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TEXAS TARTAR THE MAN WITH NINE LIVES



OR,

Yank Yellowbird's Best Yank.

BY WM. H. MANNING,
AUTHOR OF "WILD WEST WALT," "BORDER
BULLET," "CENTRAL PACIFIC PAUL,"
"KANSAS KITTEN," "THE DUKE
OF DAKOTA," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

GRIZZLY GEORGE PLANS A TRAGEDY.

THE day was closing darkly, and the last rays of the sun, struggling through the black clouds, fell upon a figure as grim, and a face as stern, as the frowning expanse of the heavens above.

The human figure was a lone one, and lonely were his surroundings. He stood in a graveyard, but in that remote town of the far Northwest, history was too nearly new for a crowded home of the dead. Only a few graves had yet been made, and the rudest of headstones marked the place where the silent inhabitants slept, and where the skulking wolf had prowled only a few months before, fearless and unharmed.

One grave was newly-made—so new that the lumps of earth which remained by the carefully-relaid turf were still damp and fresh, and there

"A HANDKERCHIEF!" EXCLAIMED THE TEXAS DETECTIVE. "BY JOVE! WE MAY HAVE A CLEW HERE!"

the lonely man stood and communed with his thoughts and brooded over the past, the present and the future.

He was well known at Powderhorn Mile, as the village a hundred yards away was called, and every one had a good word for him. He was known as Grizzly George, and was a veteran hunter, scout and guide. In his day he had wandered over most of the West, but when old age came upon him, he had located at Powderhorn Mile, regarding it as about the wildest of Wild West towns, and had hoped to pass the remainder of his days in peace and quiet.

No such thoughts were in his mind that evening, and the reason was as simple as it was terrible. His hopes, his heart, almost his life, lay buried in the grave before him.

Recently made as was the grave, a wooden head-piece had already been erected, and rudely cut in the surface was the simple inscription:

"EVE,

Aged 18."

Brief as it was, a whole volume lay in the inscription. It was a history of sorrow, death and despair, with enough of mystery to make an element of doubt and uncertainty.

Grizzly George slowly brushed his rough hand across his eyes.

"This is the end o' all!" he muttered. "The parson said so, an' he was right. It is the end o' more than my poor gal's life; it is the end o' my hopes. What did the parson say about findin' consolation in prayer? I reckon he didn't jest know old George Hendricks, and he sartainly didn't know *her*. The end o' all? Not much! One thing ain't reached a beginnin', yit, but it will, right soon. Its name is *vengeance*!"

His grim face grew dark and threatening, and he raised one hand aloft, but let it fall slowly.

"No, thar ain't no need on't. Let them who are less in 'arnest than me make theater work o' what they have ter say; I'll not talk, but *act*!"

He cast one more look at the grave, and then turned and walked away resolutely.

There was something very striking in the man's sorrow and despair. He was outwardly controlling his emotions well, but it was plain that he was severely shaken, and he was a man who felt keenly at all times. Unless he was utterly indifferent in regard to any matter, he had a strong opinion, and it was so with his likes and his dislikes. He loved and hated with intense feeling.

His course took him along the edge of the village, and at one point he paused and looked at the largest, finest house of which Powderhorn Mile could boast.

"How different it is thar!" he muttered. "I have buried my dead, but in the big house they are preparin' fur the weddin'. I don't s'pose Norma Westerley gives a thought ter my poor gal, though they do say she ain't hard-hearted, ef she is rich. I hope she'll be happy, an' I reckon she will, fur Robert Kendall is a right nice young feller. He was always pleasant when he come ter my house, an' Eve liked him, too. But it seems sort o' wrong fur them ter marry when the sods in the graveyard are only jest turned fur one who was as good as any woman in the town."

Shaking his head, he again walked on toward home.

Powderhorn Mile was one of the most northerly towns in the United States. It lay so close to the British Possessions that the little lake upon whose shore the village was built was nearly one-half north of the line.

This sheet of water was known as Rifle Lake, and it was partly this, and partly its own peculiar shape, which had given the village its name. The lake was surrounded with hills, and as the land suitable for building was only a narrow strip, the houses erected one by one had followed the curving side of the lake—hence, the name, Powderhorn Mile.

Mining and agriculture flourished alike among the inhabitants, and if the former industry claimed the majority among its followers, the miners could say that they were making the most money. That they were doing remarkably well could not be added, for Powderhorn Mile was not rich in auriferous soil.

Grizzly George went on to his home, which was the most northerly of any house there. It was a lonely home, now, and he realized the fact painfully when he entered the door. There was no one to greet him, and his strong hand trembled as, shrinking from the growing shadows, he struck a light.

All the things around him had hitherto been sanctified by the care, presence and touch of one he loved, and his heart grew still heavier as he thought of this. Looking grimly ahead, he advanced to set the lamp on the table.

A surprise awaited him there. Upon the table lay a sealed envelope—something very rare in that house—and he took it up with a puzzled air.

"D'rected ter me. Yes; hyar's the name, plain enough—George Hendricks. That's me, though I skeercely recognize it in that form. Who's writ ter me? Can't imagine, nobow. 'Tain't a common thing."

He turned the letter over and over in growing curiosity, and it was some little time before the idea entered his slow mind that the explanation could probably be found inside.

Then he opened the envelope.

He was not much of a scholar, but he found no trouble in reading the very distinct lines on the single page. They were as follows:

"GRIZZLY GEORGE:—

"In the hour of your sorrow forget not her who will be the light of your home no more. Eve Hendricks is only a memory, now, but her memory is sacred. She had no enemy among the worthy citizens of Powderhorn Mile, and nothing but good can be said of her. Yet, it is known that some man won her affections and then, proving faithless, threw the treasure away. You know the result—your daughter has met the end of a suicide, if appearances are reliable.

"You say that you do not know the man upon whom she so unwisely, unhappily fixed her affections. Are you blind, Grizzly George? Whom did you often receive as a trusted guest in the past? Who came often to your cabin? Who showed such a 'brotherly' liking for Eve? Who was the male companion she liked best? Are you blind, Grizzly George?

"To day, your daughter will be consigned to her last home; to-night, there will be a grand wedding at the Westerley house. Norma, the beautiful and rich, will trust her future to Robert Kendall. Pray heaven she may not fare as badly as one other who did that thing, for, as sure as you are living, George Hendricks, the faithless lover of your lost Eve was Robert Kendall. Consider the past, and see if you do not find confirmation of the revelation of

"A FRIEND."

Hendricks read eagerly, and as fast as he was able, and his excitement increased every moment. But by accident or design the letter was so constructed that his feelings were worked upon to the utmost, and the revelation at the end fell when he was in a mood far from calm.

The letter dropped from his relaxed fingers.

"Robert Kendall!" he uttered, in a whisper.

Slowly he raised one hand to his head. He was dazed, and his very expression was unconsciously tragic. He looked blankly at vacancy, and could not fully comprehend. His indecision was painful, and it soon found utterance in words.

"Who did it say?"

He picked up the paper and read the last lines again.

"Robert Kendall!" he reiterated, and then a flush rose to his pale cheeks. "*Him!*—the man I received hyar as an honored guest! He the one! Why, he was my friend, an' Eve's. Eve's! Yes, yes; that's what the letter says, an' I see it now. Who else so likely ter be the one as him? I knowed he an' Eve liked each other. An' so he's the one that won her love an' deserted her, drivin' her to suicide!"

The bereaved man drew a quick, sharp breath. His reasoning faculties were benumbed by prior events, but he was slowly working his way to light, and full comprehension bade fair to bring tragic consequences with it.

"I didn't think it o' him. I trusted him, an' thought him a fine young feller, an' what has he done?"

Deeper grew the flush in the speaker's face, and the flash of his eyes foreboded a storm.

"He drove her to death—my Eve; the only one I had ter care fur me; the staff o' my old age. She lies in the graveyard now, an' he—he will marry another girl ter-night!"

Grizzly George crushed the letter in his big hand and flung it far away.

"Will he?" cried the old man, all his anger surging into action at once. "Will he? I ain't so sure o' that. I said at the start that the man who had played my Eve false should suffer, but I didn't know then that 'twas a man I had openly received hyar as a friend. The Judas! The scoundrel!"

Quick and unnatural was the borderman's breathing, and his gaze wandered to the rifle which hung on the wall. His grim face grew darker, and he went forward and took the weapon down. It shook in his tremulous grasp perceptibly, but he did not heed the fact.

"Come hyar, old rifle; thar is more work fur you ter do. You an' me have b'en on many a trail tergether, an' you never failed me yet. You won't fail me now. You've brought down Injun an' grizzly b'ar, an' you won't fail on a human traitor. So Robert Kendall would marry another gal, eh? Wal, wal, we'll see!"

Sitting down, he held the rifle in his lap and engaged in thought for some time. He was an honest man, and his long career in the West had not been sullied by one act of which he need be ashamed, but there was now that in his mind which transformed the man.

If Grizzly George had his way, the wedding of the evening would end in a tragedy dark and terrible. While those in the big house of Powderhorn Mile were making preparations for a happy event, Hendricks was planning to send the groom of the evening out of the world forever.

It required no great degree of planning. When all were assembled he could move quietly to a position near the house, and when he brought his unerring rifle to bear upon Robert Kendall, he was not likely to miss.

He arose and began to clean the weapon carefully.

"It'll be a dark weddin' night," he muttered. "I'm a bit sorry fur Norma Westerley, but I don't do it ter injure *her*. It's him who would marry her—the man who drove my gal ter death—that my vengeance is ag'in', an' that man will never see another sunrise. I'll settle it with Robert Kendall, once an' forever!"

CHAPTER II.

TEXAS TARTAR GETS POINTS.

NEAR the village a small structure stood on the shore of the lake which was dignified by the name of "boat-house." Rude as it was the name could not be called a misnomer, for it was the headquarters of an honest man who owned several boats, but the only way he could store them in the shanty was by strict economy of room.

At about the same time that Grizzly George was leaving the graveyard, the owner of the boat-house sat in front of his nautical quarters, engaged in extracting comfort from a short, black pipe. He was a man of middle age, and strong and heavy. His features were coarse and rugged, but his expression was good-humored and contented.

Footsteps caused him to turn, and he saw a good-looking stranger. This man came straight to the happy smoker.

"Good-evening, sir," he said, courteously.

"I judge that you are the owner of these craft?" The speaker waved his hand toward the half-dozen boats that rocked at the water's edge.

"I am that," the boatman replied.

"And you are Mr. Purcell?"

"Tim Purcell is me name, but divil a 'Mister' is dhere to it. An honest mon don't make sich a handle, but whin Oi fall to hoss-st'alín' or the loikes, Oi'll begin to fly me kite high, an' be a 'Mister.'"

"Just so, my friend. Well, on one point we are fully agreed—you own the boats. Now, can I hire you to take me out?"

"Out ave phat?"

"Out on the lake, for a row."

The boatman removed his pipe.

"You're a stranger in Powderhorn Mile, eh?"

"Yes."

"B'en here long?"

"Five hours."

"Oi didn't ketch yer name."

"Texas Tartar."

"Eh?"

"My name is Texas Tartar."

"Dhe Ould Nick it is! Phat's the rest of it?"

"There is no more. In our family we scorn the threadbare names of Tom, Dick and Harry, and all the rest; hence, my peculiar name. There is no more; no Smith, Jones or Schooper-havenhoffer—plain names like those would never fit the Tartar family."

Purcell looked curiously at the speaker. Eccentric men were not scarce in the West, and he had heard hard names claimed before, but Texas Tartar was well worth looking at. He was a Western sport.

His garments, which were of fashionable cut, were made from English cloth, and were scrupulously neat. His boots were polished, and he wore immaculate collar and cuffs, while in the white expanse of shirt-front below his neck was a glittering diamond. Two things, only, served to separate him, in looks, from the swell of Eastern cities. One was that he wore his jet-black hair very long; the other was that a very business-looking revolver reposed in a visible position.

His whole air was dashing, and if any one had been disposed to consider him at all dandyish, one good look at his muscular form and keen, strong face would change the impression.

"Wal," returned Purcell, "ef Texas Tartar suits you fur a name, Oi'm sure I don't kick."

"It suits me well, and so does my other title. Some persons call me 'The Man with Nine Lives.'"

"Howly Pater! phat for?"

"Because I have the fabled nine lives of a cat. Ketch on, Timothy?"

"Oi presume I do. You are hard ter kill, eh?"

"Yes, and hard to keep killed, after being once sent over the range. But about our boat-ride—do we go out, Timothy?"

"D'ye moind that Oi axed yer name, a bit ago, an' axed was yez a stranger hyar?"

"You did, certainly."

"Oi knowed you was a stranger."

"How?"

"Nobody else w'u'd think ave goin' out on de lake atther dark."

"How's that, my friend?"

"Dhe Horned Fish would get yez."

"Hullo! now you puzzle me. What the dickens is the Horned Fish?"

"Oi suspect 'tis de Ould Nick's own chummy; but naturalists an' fleabogomists say it is a swordfish. I dunno."

"You puzzle me, Timothy. Explain!"

"For de last siv'ral months some sort av a demon has infested dhe lake. Previous to that dhe young p'ple used often ter go boating on dhe lake at night, an' Oi have rowed out about ivery wan ave thim; but yez couldn't hire a young leddy to make dhe thrip now. A demon has appeared in dhe lake. Phat it is Oi dunno,

but some say 'tis a sword-fish, phativer that may be. Anyhow, it's mighty bad ter navigation. Five ave me boats was ripped open loike aig-shells, an' they w'd all be gone if Oi was fool enough to go out wid thim at night."

"You interest me, Timothy. Have you ever seen this demon-fish yourself?"

"Oi have, that."

"What does it look like?"

"It's not 'aisy to say, for dhe varmint only shows up at night, an' whin it does appear it comes loike a flash. *Whiz!* an' you foind your boat split open an' siukin'. All you have seen is a black back stickin' up above dhe wather. That's the fish, an' out ave his head grows a horn, long an' sharp, an' it cuts open a boat at wan sthroke."

"Remarkable! I would not have believed this from most men, but yours is an honest face."

"That's more than Oi can say for dhe fish. He has a most villainous face, an' the nose ave him, or the sword, if ye want to call it so, makes a cuttin' argyment in a fracas."

"I score one for you, Timothy. And so this peaceful lake really has a scourge!"

"It has, that."

A smile flitted over Texas Tartar's face, and it was plain that he was far from being awed by the story. They were within a few feet of the water, and the Horned Fish might at any moment appear to them, but The Man with Nine Lives was calm and careless.

"I hear that we are to have a wedding in town to-night," he observed, suddenly changing the subject.

"Right ye are, mister."

"Do you know the parties?"

"Do Oi? Manny's the toime I've taken thim out in me boat durin' the day."

"They represent the high-toned part of your citizens, don't they?"

"The very *bong tongue*—ain't that what dhey call it in Frinch?"

"*Bon ton*, I think you mean. Aristocratic and rich, eh?"

"Oi don't know so much about Robert Kendall, who is a bit ave a stranger; but Norma Westerley is a jewel. How such a family as theirs iver wandered to a wild place like this, I dunno, but here dhey are. Ould Captain Lloyd Grandford is dhe head ave dhe family, an' dhe Westerleys are his sister's children. There are three ave thim—ave the Westerleys, I mean—for Norma has two brothers. David an' Edgar are their names, and roight likely lads dhey are. Thim there is Albia Earle, who lives in de house as fri'nd to Norma. Governess, Oi bel'ave they call Albia, but there is no wan to t'ach'. Toime was she had for a pupil a younger sister ave Norma, but de child died, an' Albia was kept in de family."

Texas Tartar was looking out over the lake, but it was noticeable that he allowed no word to pass unheard.

"The Westerley family all stand well here, I judge."

"They do, that."

"Any other rich persons in town?"

"Well, dhere is Jacob Ilbrahim."

"Who is Ilbrahim?"

"A Jew trader."

Purcell's manner had grown scornful, and The Man with Nine Lives smiled quietly.

"Is he high-toned, too?"

"Is he? Howly Pater! old Ilbrahim is a miser, a ch'ate an' a skinflint. It's not ivery man will speak ag'in him, for he is rich an' not without power; but Oi don't care if he hears me, it's a mighty poor opinion Oi have ave ould Jacob."

"He keeps the village store, don't he?"

"The very same."

"Making money?"

"He ought to."

"Why so?"

Boatman Purcell held up one finger significantly.

"Mum is the wurrud, boss, but I wouldn't swear that ould Jacob gets his goods as honest as some. Mon, did ye iver hear o' *smugglers*?"

Texas Tartar was lighting a cigar. He calmly finished the operation before he answered.

"I believe I have," he carelessly returned.

"Around here?"

"No. Do you have those lively chaps here?"

"Howly Pater! Oi should say so! We coome mighty near bein' roight a-straddle the line between this country an' t'other, an' the temptation to carry goods across is so strong some folks can't resist it. A good bit ave duty is saved thereby."

"But the revenue officers? Ain't there any of them around here to collect duties?"

"A heap ave thim, but do you s'pose they kin baffle all ave the slippery gents?"

"I see. They try their best, but the smugglers will, and do, get goods from the British soil over here, eh?"

"So 'tis said, but Oi can't say."

Tim was suddenly growing cautious.

"And you think old Jacob Ilbrahim may be selling some of these contraband goods over his counter?"

"Oi can't prove it."

The boatman was deeply devoted to his pipe.

In his readiness to retail the gossip of the village he had overlooked the fact that, being a stranger, Texas Tartar might also be dangerous, and he suddenly gave such evidence of quickened caution that The Man with Nine Lives smiled and let the matter drop.

It lacked but little of actual darkness at that time, and Purcell had risen to return to the village when three other men appeared, walking along the shore of the lake. They came nearer, and the leader addressed Tim somewhat brusquely.

"Do you live here?"

"No; Oi live in a house over beyent."

"Where is the Westerley house?"

"Fix yer visual optics dead ahead an' ye may be able to see it. 'Tis the big house over that way."

"Thank you!"

Answering curtly, the man walked rapidly on toward the village, and his companions followed. Texas Tartar and Tim exchanged a glance, but, oddly enough, neither had a word to say. Perhaps, however, their thoughts were much alike.

"I'll walk to the village with you, Timothy," observed the young man, carelessly. "I'm stopping there, just now. I'm from Texas, myself, but, being an idle wanderer, I'm liable to be seen 'most anywhere. I came here thinking that I might see some fun of a truly lively sort."

"Me friend," replied Tim, "if ye don't see all of it ye want around here, it'll be because ye get shot before ye get yer fill!"

CHAPTER III.

HUNTING THE SMUGGLERS.

THE three men who had inquired the way to Westerley's lost no time on the road, but just as they neared the house they met another party which, by chance, was of just their own number. It was composed of two young men and one who was of somewhat advanced years—the latter being a tall, strongly-formed, soldierly-looking gentleman.

This man was hurriedly addressed by one of the first trio.

"Excuse me, sir, but whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"My name is Lloyd Grandford."

"Captain Grandford! I thought as much. I am in great haste, but I have a few questions to ask you, and I would like a private interview."

"Sorry, but I shall have to say no. I, too, am busy, and I can't return to the house. If you have anything to say to me, speak out."

"But, sir, it is private—"

He glanced at Grandford's companions.

"I have no secrets from my young friends, here," returned Grandford. "One, David Westerley, is my nephew; the other, Robert Kendall, will, *Deo volente*, be my nephew before morning."

"Excuse me," replied the stranger; "I was not aware that the young gentlemen were of your own family. As you request, I will speak out. I and my companions are customs officers, and we are looking for smugglers. Can you tell us anything new?"

"No. Everything has been quiet here during the past fortnight."

"Still, we have received news that valuable goods are about to be run over the line. Just what they are we don't know, but it is no common trash."

"Well, I hope you'll get them," observed Grandford. "Those fellows get the benefit of illegal traffic which does not help any of us. Close as we are to the line, we are all opposed to it."

"I wouldn't vouch for all your citizens."

"Nor I, for that matter."

"What I want to know is, have you seen two or three strangers pass through here, on horseback, during the afternoon?"

"No," answered Grandford, and Westerley and Kendall echoed the negative, when questioned.

"We got track of some of the smugglers, and we hope to run them down. We shall go beyond the village—we have horses near—and try to find the other horsemen. It is my theory that the smuggling will be done to-night, and I shall nip it in the bud, if possible. We shall watch the lake sharply to-night, lying in wait at the Point of Pines."

"I wish you good luck," declared Grandford.

"By the way, is your name Tabor?"

"Yes, and my associates are Wells and Craver."

"I have heard of you. And now, sir, if you are done, I will go on. We are in haste."

"We won't keep you, captain. We, too, are in a hurry. Perhaps, though, we shall be able to show the smugglers to you by to-morrow."

"Bring them on!" responded Grandford, heartily. "We haven't a jail big enough to hold many, but we can, at least, give you a lift on your way home."

The two parties separated and each went its way, but no one had any idea what strong bearing the apparent common-place interview was to have on the tragic events about to follow. As a thunder-storm gathers in the atmosphere,

so was trouble gathering in Powderhorn Mile, and when the lightning flashed, destruction would follow.

Continuing their journey the officers were soon at the further end of the village. At this point they saw a man cleaning his rifle carefully near the open door of his rude home.

"He's preparing for a hunt," observed Craver carelessly.

The speaker was right. The man in the shanty was preparing for a hunt, and, like themselves, his object was human game.

The man they had seen was Grizzly George, and he was making sure that his rifle was in perfect condition before going out on the darkest hunt he had ever engaged in.

Tabor and his companions had horses just beyond the village, and when they had recovered them, they mounted and rode north along the lake-shore. Night had fully fallen, and anything like following a trail was out of the question, but theirs was not an aimless journey. They had long been hunting the smugglers, and the latest information received was of such a nature that they had hopes of bagging game that night. It was their theory that the smugglers were far from being desperate men, and their own lack of numbers did not deter them from vigorous action.

"The capture means an earthquake at Powderhorn Mile," said Tabor, continuing the conversation.

"Do you really think the smugglers have confederates there?" asked Wells.

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"Was it wise to tell as much as we did?" added Craver, slowly.

"To Grandford?"

"Yes."

"What harm could it do? He is the leading man of the town."

"He is all right, of course, but what of his companions?"

"He vouched for them."

"Oh! I presume it's all right, but it is best to be shy."

"That's what the smugglers think, but we are going to nab them. I am next to positive that the seat of the particular mischief we are running down is right here at Powderhorn Mile. The contraband articles come across this lake, or along its shores—you can depend upon that. But you will soon have proof."

"Unless the Horned Fish catches us before we catch the smugglers."

"Bah! don't refer to that silly fable."

"Then you don't believe in it?"

"Not in the least."

"How about the boats that have been run down by it? The people tell straight stories."

"Possibly; or it may be that they are lying. If they tell the truth, it is the work of a practical joker or an enemy. How about haunted houses? They and their ghosts seem all right, but, when sifted out, it is always found that human beings, for a joke or for malicious mischief, have caused it all. So with this mysterious Horned Fish, which goes galloping about the lake like mad."

"Possibly it will catch us," observed Wells.

"Or the smugglers," added Craver.

Tabor did not relish these remarks. He was too much in earnest to take interest in light talk. His thoughts were all of the smugglers, and he hoped to make a capture that night. Until of late he had supposed that the articles conveyed across the line without the payment of duty were of comparatively small value. The United States and the British Possessions northwest of the Great Lakes (especially Manitoba) each produces articles not common to the other, but they are mostly the practical articles of life.

Of late, however, Tabor had received trustworthy information that more valuable, and less necessary articles were being handled. These reports were to the effect that diamonds and other jewelry, and laces and silks, were among the things brought over the line to be sold in the great cities of the republic. Where these articles originally started from was not known. Possibly they were brought from Victoria or New Westminster, but it was Tabor's theory that they had been sent on from the eastern provinces because, for some reason, the smugglers believed they could work more safely in the West, this gain making amends for the fact that they must operate on a much smaller scale.

The Point of Pines, as mentioned by Tabor to Captain Grandford, was where the officers hoped to catch their prey, and they arrived there in less than two hours after leaving Powderhorn Mile.

It was a small point of land which made out into the lake, and was admirably adapted to the purpose. They were at its narrowest point right there. The little cape took up considerable room, while, on the east side of the sheet of water, a broken ridge extended into the lake. This ledge was nearly all under water, but sharp points of rock arose above the surface at frequent intervals. Consequently, any one who knew the place at all well would naturally seek the deep channel between the end of the ledge and the nose of the cape.

Tabor expected the smugglers to do this without fear. They knew that attention had been paid to them, and I had left some deceptive signs. These signs went to show that the traffic was by way of another part of the lake, and it did not seem likely that the free-traders would expect any trouble at the Point of Pines.

The officers secured their horses several rods back of the water's edge, and then walked down to the extreme point. Tall, vigorous pine trees were everywhere about them, the tops forming an almost unbroken mass, while the ground was so covered with needles from the trees that it was like a carpet.

They settled down to their watch. They had previously conveyed a boat secretly to the cape but did not expect to use it. In their opinion, they had only to hail the smugglers, as they tried to pass, and the men would surrender at once.

The officers had weapons, but did not expect to do any fighting.

None of them felt the usual monotony of a lonely watch, for the scene was grand. The lake was calm, and nothing is more majestic and subtle in its influence than a forest of pines.

Two hours passed, and midnight was near at hand. The watchers reclined on the needle-laden ground and quietly kept their vigil.

"Hark!—what was that?"

Tabor suddenly raised his head. No one answered, but his gaze was fixed up the lake. Was it fancy, or did the faint splash of oars come to them on the heavy air?

"Be ready to enter the boat," added the leader, "but don't do this unless I give the word."

"Somebody's surely coming!" declared Craver.

He was right; there was no longer room to doubt that the sound they had heard was that of oars. A boat was on the lake, and it was approaching from exactly the point they expected the smugglers to come. No great care was being used, though the oarsmen seemed to be skillful, and the echoes fell with the peculiar sound always noticeable in such cases in a still night.

At last the boat, itself, was to be distinguished, a dark speck in the night. The officers arose, drew their weapons and stood close to the water's edge, yet far enough back to be invisible.

Another brief delay, and the craft loomed up boldly only a few fathoms away. Four men were the occupants, and Tabor did not doubt that they were those he sought.

He prepared for the venture.

"Boat ahoy!" he called, in a loud voice.

Somewhat to his surprise the oars were promptly lifted, and the boat drifted noiselessly.

"Row this way!" added Tabor, authoritatively.

"Who are you?" replied a voice.

"Some one who has business with you. I command you to land, in the name of the law!"

"The law of spies don't prevail here, you miserable sneaks! *Fire, boys!*"

The words came from behind the officers in a hoarse, angry voice, and Tabor wheeled abruptly. He saw several forms in the semi-darkness, and it flashed upon him that they were in a trap, but he had time to see no more. The last order was obeyed, and several rifles flashed as one. Tabor heard a bullet whistle past his head, and a prickling sensation on the side of his neck told that one bullet had come close to a vital part.

But the volley did more than that.

Craver reeled and fell against his superior, and then, as his life-blood spattered upon Tabor, fell dead at the latter's feet. Wells also went down, and the officer realized that of his own party he was the only one left alive.

The riflemen were rushing toward him, and the instinct of self-preservation overcame all other impulses. He turned and made a rush for the water—the only way of escape open to him. A revolver was fired, but he kept on and plunged into the lake.

He was a strong, skillful swimmer, and had not lost his presence of mind. He calculated the chances and considered the dangers accurately, and knew that he must at once get away. To remain would be to share the fate of his unfortunate companions.

Even then he could, he thought, see the cause of all this tragic work.

"It was the smugglers," he thought, as he swam for life, "and I have been betrayed. Nobody knew we were coming here but the three men I rashly told at the village. One of them has betrayed me!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE HUNTER SEEKS HIS PREY.

GRIZZLY GEORGE took down his rifle again. He had cleaned it until not a speck of smoke or dust adhered to it, and then prepared and eaten his frugal supper. He was strangely, ominously calm, and that it was anything but a natural mood was revealed by the fact that he no longer seemed to mourn for his lost daughter.

To kill Robert Kendall—to shoot him as he stood in the presence of his bride—was now the ruling passion of the ex-hunter's life. He was

not, and had never been, a cruel or lawless man, but Eve's fate had stirred him to the quick, and, for once, he was determined to take the law into his own hands.

Kendall had trifled with the girl's affections, and grief had driven her to suicide. Was it not right that the false lover should suffer to the uttermost?

This was Grizzly George's line of reasoning, and he was not gifted with mental qualities necessary to tell him that there was a doubt in the case. Kendall had seemed to be his friend, and he had liked the young man. The only evidence against him was the anonymous letter.

If the ex-hunter had lived in the busy world, instead of the almost unsettled region of the West, he would have realized the importance of making some investigation before believing a statement to which the writer dared not sign his name, but Grizzly George believed other men, as a rule, as honest as himself.

He had watched the time critically, and when the hour for the wedding drew near, he took down his rifle and left the house. The village was supposed to be a mile long, and there were houses scattered that distance, but it was not a long walk to the big Westerly house.

When he reached the vicinity he found the house well lighted throughout, and, greatly to his satisfaction, the curtains of the main room, where the ceremony was to take place, were not lowered.

The invited guests were assembled inside, and all were in high spirits. Remote as Powderhorn Mile was from large towns there were many persons there who dressed well, and the scene was by no means a rude one. It would compare favorably with more pretentious scenes.

Grizzly George stood well back and looked keenly at the company. Norma Westerley, the bride-elect, was not present, nor was her friend, Albia Earle.

But where was Robert Kendall?

The ex-hunter looked in vain, and soon satisfied himself that none of the prominent parties were present.

"I wish he'd come," the would-be avenger thought. "It'd be rather rough ter shoot him down by Miss Norma's side, an' I don't want her ter suffer as my Eve did."

He winced at the thought which then arose. Would not Norma suffer, anyway, when her chosen husband was shot down in the marriage hour?

"It's hard," admitted Grizzly George, shaking his head gravely, "but it's got ter be done."

He sat down on a convenient rock and kept up his observation. He was as calm as though he was watching for deer, but his purpose remained unchanged. He intended to shoot Kendall, and he rarely looked along the rifle-barrel in vain.

Ten minutes passed. He knew that the appointed time must have arrived, but there was no sign of the bridal pair. Instead, a singular change seemed to have taken place in the manner of the guests. Before, they had been laughing and talking merrily, but, now, the laughter was hushed, and they had gathered in a group and were talking gravely and earnestly.

"What's up?" inquired Grizzly George, as though he had a companion to answer.

Several minutes passed, but there was no change in the situation. Half an hour wore away. Still the bride and groom did not appear. It was nearly an hour past the set hour—the delay was puzzling, but everything indicated that something unpleasant had occurred.

Grizzly George could bear it no longer. He saw, just outside the door, two men who, he knew, had been engaged as servants for the night.

He walked forward to them.

"How's the weddin'?" he asked, abruptly.

"Thar ain't none, yet," was the answer.

"Ain't it time?"

"Long past."

"Then why don't they git married?"

"Miss Westerley has took sick."

"How's that?"

"It's mighty mysterious, that's how 'tis."

"I don't understand."

"No more does anybody. She's gone inter sort o' trance."

"More likely she's dyin'," corrected the second man.

"I don't believe that," returned his companion.

"I'd thank ye ter explain," patiently insisted George.

"Wal, ye see she has gone insensible. The other gals had her all fixed up in her female fripperies, an' then she sot down in a cheer an' actually seemed ter go right ter sleep. The gals thought this uncommon cur'us, an' when they tried ter wake her up, they couldn't do it, b' gosh! They thought as how she was playin' a joke, thought it was uncommon unlike Norma Westerley ter do it; but Albia Earle, she said the bride was sick, an' she sent for the doctor."

"What does he say?"

Grizzly George asked the question mechanically. He was but little interested in Norma; his thoughts were still of Robert Kendall.

"He's puzzled, Doc is. He don't understand what the racket is."

"The gal is goin' ter die!" persisted the man with the gloomy view of the case.

"I don't think it."

"What's up, then?"

"Dunno, b'gosh."

"Whoever knowed a bride ter fall inter sech a state afore? She don't know a blamed thing. She's jest like a person asleep, only the sleep ain't nat'ral. It's the most queerest thing I ever hear'n of."

"Whar is Kendall?" inquired Grizzly George.

"Som'ers in the house."

"What's he doin'?"

"Feelin' bad, I reckon."

This careless response was not in keeping with Grizzly George's terribly-earnest mood. He looked toward the doors from under scowling brows, handled his rifle nervously, and wished that Kendall would appear and have it over at once.

"Will the weddin' be postponed?" he asked.

"Wal, I reckon 'twill unless the gal wakes up."

George gave the idle joker an angry glance.

"The doctor may bring her 'round."

"He's tried his level best, an' he's failed. He don't reckon she's dangerous sick, but thar is somethin' about the biz he don't ketch onter at all."

The ex-hunter was tempted to send for Kendall, and have the matter settled, but if the groom was mourning over his stricken bride, it was by no means sure that he would respond to a call.

Looking at the matter thus, George retreated to his old position, and sat down upon the rock to keep his grim death-watch as before. The appearance of Robert Kendall would be the signal for the tragedy. Truly, the prospects of the bridal evening were anything but pleasant.

Another half-hour passed, and then there was a stir in the house. A moment later the guests began to come out, and Grizzly George realized that the wedding had been postponed. The chances of seeing Kendall at once seemed good, and he grimly prepared for the last act in the dark drama.

The disappointed guests emerged in a grave, subdued mood, but there was no loitering, and the last had soon passed the door.

Kendall, however, had not appeared.

Grizzly George waited somewhat longer, but grew anxious in a short time. The men he had interviewed before were still near the door, but the regular employees of the family began to close the house. George went forward to the men.

"What's become of him?" he asked, abruptly.

"Become of who?"

"Kendall."

"He's gone."

"Gone whar?"

"I don't know, but him and Dave Westerley went out by t'other door jest afore the guests began ter go."

Grizzly George scowled angrily.

"Which way did they go?"

"I didn't notice. Did you, Ben?"

"No."

"The gal ain't recovered her senses yet," added the leading speaker.

The ex-hunter turned impatiently away. At that moment he did not care a picayune whether Norma Westerley was conscious or not. His one desire was to get the coveted shot at Kendall, and he was certainly frustrated for the time being.

His inexorable purpose did not change in the least, and he walked to the house where he knew the young man had been boarding. It was dark and silent. The life-hunter waited half an hour, but, as there was no change, finally went away. He had no object in view, but, without any premeditation, finally found himself once more by his daughter's grave.

There he found enough to occupy his mind, but he had previously nursed his revengeful feelings so much that his thoughts took another turn.

Memory went back over the long years that Eve had been the light of his otherwise solitary life, and he found himself dwelling upon the countless incidents wherein she had cheered and delighted his simple nature. Hatred and revenge were forgotten, and he fell into a gentler mood.

This was his condition when he finally turned his face homeward and walked along the water-line. Midnight was at hand, and he had not expected to meet any one, but when he reached Tim Purcell's boat-house he came suddenly upon two men who were engaged in earnest conversation.

Grizzly George was not in a social mood, and he would have passed without giving them any particular attention, but it was not so to be. One of the two addressed him.

"You are out late, Hendricks."

The ex-hunter stopped quickly. He believed that he recognized the voice, and was not surprised when he saw that the speaker was David Westerley. Without replying, he looked at the second man.

It was Robert Kendall.

Grizzly George's mood had changed wonder-

fully, or there would have been a tragedy at once. He saw the man for whom he had been hunting, but the discovery did not fire his nature. Instead, he experienced a sensation as though his blood was suddenly flowing in a sluggish way, and he looked stupidly at the men.

"A pleasant night," added Westerley.

"Yes."

The ex-hunter answered mechanically, but it was at Kendall, not Westerley, that he looked.

"Have you been out on the lake?"

"No."

"You do well; the Horned Fish may be astir."

"There is other dangerous things 'round hyar besides the Horned Fish," answered George, looking at Kendall in the same fixed way. "Thar is some scourges not so mister'us as the Horned Fish, an' not so hard ter find. I've b'en lookin' fur one on 'em, an' I reckon I have found hiin."

CHAPTER V.

AN ACCUSATION DENIED.

THE ex-hunter's voice was thick and heavy, but his words did not seem to convey any significance to Westerley.

"What have you found?" David asked.

Grizzley George leaned heavily upon his rifle. He still looked at Robert Kendall, but the darkness prevented any such thing as observing that young man's expression.

"Until a couple days ago," returned George, "I had a darter. I was a lone man only fur that, an' I reckon I'd have lived out my old life huntin' an' scoutin' until a hostile bullet laid me low, or old age tackled an' got the best on me. As ter that I can't say, fur I did hev some one else ter think of. That was Eve. She was the light o' my life, an' when I come home at night her bright ways cheered me up amazin'. That was how it was, but it ain't so now."

"You have my sympathy, George."

"Mister Kendall don't speak," added the ex-hunter.

The silent man started.

"Overlook it, friend Hendricks," he replied; "I was deep in my own painful thoughts. I think, however, that I do not need to tell you how sorry I am. I have often been your guest; I have gone with you on more than one hunt; and I, too, knew and liked Eve."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Did she like you?"

"I believe she respected me, friend George, and regarded me as a friend."

"No more?"

"I don't understand."

"I've heerd it said thar is nobody so hard ter see as them who won't see."

"I am still in the dark."

"The amount of it is," put in Westerley, "George is deep in sorrow. That explains it."

"No, it don't explain it," returned the ex-hunter in the unnaturally-stolid manner which had settled upon him. "Thar is more. My girl left a note which said that some man had won her love, an' then deserted her; an' it was that which driv her ter suicide. I know who the man was."

It was Westerley who made reply:

"Who was it?"

Grizzley George extended one hand toward Kendall.

"Him! That's the man!"

"What's that?" demanded Kendall with another start.

"I say you are the man who won my girl's heart, an' then tossed her over fur a richer bride!"

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Kendall, "are you mad?"

"It's a wonder I ain't, with the load that is upon my mind."

"But do I understand you to say I had any share in poor Eve's fate?"

Hendricks leaned more heavily upon his rifle, and thickly replied:

"I do."

"You are mad, indeed. Eve never cared for me, except as a friend."

"Who did she care for?"

"That I don't know."

"I do. I've got the news, an' it ain't ter be gainsayed. Young man, it's a wonder ter me that the Lord don't strike ye right down whar you be, fur sech wickedness is beyond even man's tolerance."

"But—"

"You come ter me as a friend; you was received in my house free an' hearty, and Eve did her part to make you at home. You know how you abused that trust. She didn't see inter your black heart, my girl didn't; fur she wa'n't used ter scoundrels. I thank the good Lord that, even ef she is dead, thar is not one blemish on her. The weaknesses o' other humans was not hers, an' she went down ter her grave as spotless as an angel. She never made an enemy, an' nobody but has good ter say of her. All wished her wal but the man who was willin' ter break her heart fur the sake o' an idle flirtation. He did it, too. What is the result?"

She is in her grave, an' the man who did it is you!"

Again the accusing finger was leveled at Kendall, but the latter answered with increased excitement and earnestness:

"You wrong me, Grizzley George; you wrong me in every way. You never were more mistaken in your life. Never did I utter one word of love to her; never did I seek to gain her love; and I am positive that she had no warmer feeling for me than that of friendship. I am not even sure she had that feeling for me—certainly, there was no more."

The speaker paused for a moment, and then added, in a firmer voice:

"You have made a serious charge against me, Grizzley George. What are your grounds for doing so?"

"How's that?"

"Did Eve ever tell you she and I had a love affair?"

"No."

"Then what do you base your charge upon?"

"I've jest heerd it."

"From whom?"

"No matter."

"It matters a good deal to me."

"I can't tell ye who."

"Do you mean that you will make such a serious charge against a man, and then refuse any information as to where you get your news?"

"Jest now I kin do no other way."

"Then you act very unlike the George Hendricks I have known," declared Kendall, who, judging by appearances, seemed to be trying to control himself and speak calmly. "You have charged me with a crime of which I am innocent, and you give me no chance to defend myself. You must see how I am placed when you notice that I am now accompanied by the brother of the lady I hope to marry. What must he think of me?"

"Believe me, Robert," answered Westerley, "I place no faith in the charge. That Grizzley George is sincere I do not doubt, for he is a man of honor, but I am sure you are the same. George is laboring under a strange mistake. This, however, does not excuse him from refusing to explain. It is a duty which he cannot shirk that he explain."

"Am I my own man, or ain't I?" asked the ex-hunter, irritably.

"You certainly are, as far as your own affairs go," replied Kendall, firmly; "but when you take hold of my affairs and insult me, a common excuse will not save you."

"Save me? From what?"

"Justice! You have libeled me; I ask you to prove what you assert, or retract."

"An' what ef I don't?"

"Don't force me to consider that."

Grizzley George looked at the speaker in wonder—almost in bewilderment.

"Thar's an implied threat in yer words," he said, slowly. "You seem ter insinuate that you will do me harm ef I don't bend to ye. It's odd, consid'rin' what almost happened ter-night, an' how I feel toward ye."

The ex-hunter tightened his grasp upon his rifle with the serious intention of making sure that it was still there. He was dazed and uncertain. He had fully intended to kill Robert Kendall that night, and had been prevented only by an accident; and now that he had unexpectedly met the man, the fire of hatred burned as fiercely as ever in his heart, but he had been kept back from action by some impulse he could not fully understand.

Considering Kendall given over to him by fate for doom, it dazed him more than ever to see the presumptuous boy, whom he could almost crush in his grasp, as he believed, take such a bold stand.

"I make no threats," responded Kendall, "but I claim that you are using me badly."

"An' you hev done no harm?"

"None."

"Young man, I hev jest come from the new grave over yonder."

"Would to Heaven Eve were alive! She would exonerate me."

"Prove it."

"The burden of proof lies with you. The charge you have made is utterly false, and you decline to give reasons for such an unjust statement. Unless you speak out like a man, I refuse to talk with you longer."

Once more Kendall was speaking sharply. He might be innocent or guilty, but in any case the charge touched him keenly. He still hoped and expected to marry Norma Westerley, but if Grizzley George's story was made public it would injure him greatly, and Norma might decline to go on with the marriage until she had been convinced of his innocence.

The ex-hunter slowly lifted his rifle. A little while before he had vowed to shoot Kendall at sight. The chance was now his, but something stayed his hand. He did not fully understand why he delayed his revenge. Personally, he felt able to cope with both his present companions, but he was still in the dazed mood.

He lifted the rifle to his shoulder.

"I'll see you ag'in, ter-morrow," he observed, and walked quickly away.

Kendall looked after him with anything but a pleasant expression.

"He will see me to-morrow!" the young man declared.

"You mustn't let this trouble you; no one will believe such an absurd report," Westerley replied.

"He must retract or take the consequences."

"No doubt, the story can easily be proved false. But come, let us think no more about it. Let us walk homeward now."

"I don't think I will accompany you now, David, for I have work elsewhere. Good-night!"

He extended his hand. A cordial pressure was exchanged, and then the two separated. Westerley's course was toward home, but, when he had gone a few yards, he looked around and saw Kendall disappearing in the direction just taken by Grizzley George.

CHAPTER VI.

STRUCK DOWN IN THE DARK.

HALF an hour later two men passed along the shore of the lake. They reached and passed Purcell's boat-house, and then continued their course in a northerly direction. They walked slowly, and talked earnestly in a low voice.

One of these men was Texas Tartar, The Man with Nine Lives, and the other was a tall, bearded man of middle age.

They had reached the outskirts of the village when the second man suddenly paused.

"Hullo! what's all this?" he exclaimed.

"What do you refer to?" asked Texas Tartar.

"This!"

The speaker took two or three steps and knelt on the sand of the lake-shore, and his companion saw a human figure stretched out at full length.

"What have we here?" he demanded.

"Should say 'twas a man in an egregious fix."

"Is he dead, Yank?"

"No," replied he who had been addressed as Yank; "thar is life in him, an' his heart beats with tolerable briskness, but thar's a moisture about his head that's suggestive. Hev you a match, Texas?"

"Yes."

A transient light was soon produced, and it showed that the "moisture" Yank had felt was that of blood. The fallen man was unconscious.

"It is Grizzley George!" Texas Tartar exclaimed.

"Who's he?"

"A retired hunter who lives in the village."

"That so? Then, by hurley! I ought ter have a feller-feelin' fur him, for I have done an artom o' trampin' as hunter, an' sich like, myself. He's met an enemy, this chap has; an' he's got an egregious wipe across his head."

"Then you don't think it an accident?"

"Not much, it wa'n't. Somebody hit him a vicious blow, an' followed it up with others o' the same sort. Pooty bad bunged up, he is, though I don't reckon he's fatally hurt. Ef he's an old hunter, it'll take a heap ter kill him. Bring some water, Texas, an' let's git his lost senses back ter him."

"His house is only a few rods away—why not carry him there at once?"

"It'll be the best way. Lift him up!"

This was done with skill and care, and Grizzley George was soon in his own habitation. When a light had been made he was laid upon his bed, and his new friends set to work to resuscitate him. The tall man soon proved that he was no mean surgeon for an amateur. He washed away the blood and bound up the wounds in a commendable way. Nothing was said about sending for a doctor, for they did not consider his injuries dangerous.

"He'll soon git his senses back," Yank decided.

"Who could have assaulted him?"

"The Horned Fish, mebbe," replied Yank, dryly.

"Then we ought to have been a little sooner," returned Texas Tartar, smiling.

"So the varmint could hev laid us out, too?"

"So we could have captured it."

"I ain't much o' a fisherman, though some o' my ancestors was. One on 'em, Noah Yellowbird, built a fore-an'-aft, topsail, centerboard man-o'-war which he named the Ark, an' put out from Bangor, Maine, on a fishin'-trip ter the South Pole. They was out forty days, or more, an' ketchin' an atrocious lot o' fish, but they didn't git no sech outlandish critter as this lake-demon is."

"Probably this Horned Fish needs different bait."

"I consait so."

"Lead might take him."

"Jes' so. But I think our injured frien' is gittin' back his reasonin' faculties. I hope so, by hurley, fur it's a p'ison bad thing ter be robbed o' a man's mental equal-abraham. Doctor Eleazer Yellowbird had a case o' the sort. 'Twas a gal who had been disa'p'intin' in love, an' it struck in like the measles. She did nothin' but set an' sing 'Whar Has My Highland Lad-die Gone?' an' sech techin' anthems, all day long, an' she had a chronic flow o' tears which 'bout ruined her eyes. The doctor cured her by feedin' her on onions an' cabbage, an' he felt proud o' his cure until she turned 'round an'

sued him for breach o' promise. She got judgment an' took away his black hoss, all the property he had; but she brung it back inside a week, an' said she didn't want it, an' that ef the doctor was sech a powerful eater as the hoss, she was glad ter git off so easy. She could lead the hoss back by the bridle, but the doctor was so mortal obstinate that nobody could manage him."

Grizzly George opened his eyes. His gaze rested on them with a puzzled regard.

"Wal, neighbor, how does it go?" Yank asked.

George put his hand to his head and then winced.

"I am hurt," he muttered.

"Only an artom."

"How come I hyar?"

"We brung ye."

"I remember!" the ex-hunter suddenly exclaimed. "I was attached on the shore o' the lake. They meant ter kill me, too, but my head is tough."

"Who assaulted you?" asked Texas Tartar.

"Didn't I say?"

"No."

George was silent for a moment; then he slowly replied:

"Then I reckon I won't say."

"You ought to have the man arrested."

"Would the law avenge me?"

"Certainly."

"I'm much obliged ter the law, but I reckon I kin fight my own battles. This is sort o' a peculiar case, but I know the man who did it, though I didn't see him plain, an' I'll see him ag'in!"

The ex-hunter spoke in a significant tone, and his meaning was clear.

"I take it you had a quarrel, neighbor," observed Yank.

"Not jest then; I didn't even see him until the first blow was struck. The coward came up behind me an' hit me with a club, an' arter that I was dazed. He couldn't whipped me fair—why, I could 'a' broke him in two with one hand—but he 'most killed me 'fore I knowed he was 'round, an' then he beat me down easy. He tried ter kill me, quite, but old Gregory ain't dead yet."

"You need a nurse," said Texas Tartar.

"No, I don't; I'm an old borderer, an' I'll pull through this as I've pulled through other scrapes."

"But you are severely injured."

"I know it."

"It is not right that you should stay here alone."

"Young man, you mean wal, but I want ye ter jest let me manage my own affairs. I thank ye hearty fur bringin' me in hyar, you an—I don't know yer friend."

"I'm a borderer, too," replied the tall stranger.

"What's yer name?"

"Yank Yellowbird."

"You don't say so!"

"I consait I do."

Grizzly George must have heard of you," remarked Texas Tartar, smiling.

"Who hasn't?" demanded George, with more energy than he had shown when speaking of his own affairs. "Everybody has heerd of Yank Yellowbird, the Injun-fighter, scout an' mountaineer. The Sioux call him Nevermiss, 'cause his aim is deadly. Stranger, is that the rifle that has done it?"

The speaker looked with interest at the weapon in Yank's hands. It was unusually long, and looked both old-fashioned and ominous.

"I've carried this bit o' metal goin' on twenty year," modestly replied Yank.

"I've heerd on ye; I have, stranger, an' I've often wished ter meet you. I've fought Injuns some, myself, but I ain't the terror to 'em that you be. Few men be. Heerd of ye? Wal, I should say so; the name o' Yank Yellowbird goes ringin' through all the West!"

"Neighbor," quoth the mountaineer thus eulogized, "ef I's you I'd stop an' git breath; an' when ye git it, you may as wal take another tack. You mean wal, but your words are an egregious sight too flowery. I'm a simple old mountaineer, an' none o' them things you've painted in words. My name ain't gone a-ringin' nowhar, but has be'n right in my veskit pocket, an' elsewhar about me, all the time; while as fur the Injuns, I never did harm ter one onless the atrocious insex deserved it. I ain't no land-pirate nor butcher."

"Good gracious! I didn't mean to say you was, for nobody speaks anything but good on ye, but fame is the penalty o' bein' Yank Yellowbird."

"Don't know why it should be," declared the tall mountaineer, shaking his head gravely. "I never did nothin' uncommon, though I came o' a family mortally given ter greatness. The Yellowbirds trace their pedigree back ter Adam, who married Eve Smith an' lived at the Garden o' Eden, an' the record would go furdur ef the family had kept the facks an' figgers correct on paper. This fault o' theirs was melancholy ter contemplate, fur Adam's brother, who was named Ithamar, Salathiel, Jephthah, Issachar, Sibrean an' Jethuphalel, was all lost ter fame by want o' kerreck records."

Nevermiss took a few seconds to silently lament this mournful fact, and then added:

"A good many o' the Yellowbirds sence then has b'en noted fur somethin' or other. Doctor Ichabod Yellowbird fu'st disklivered that cold steel would cure toothache; an' Lamentations Yellowbird lost a leg on a circular saw; an' his brother, Parallelogram, could ketch a mule's foot in his trowsers pocket as neat as you please, when the mule kicked. Then my female cousin, Minnie Hattie Sadie Nettie Effie Yellowbird, writ poetry, an' my gran'-father was a Revolutionary relict. Ever hear o' him?"

"No."

"I'll tell ye about him when I git time. He was a remarkable man, an' a mortal upholder o' the tick-tacks o' war. That'll give ye some idee what the rest o' the Yellowbirds was, but I ain't no great shakes. My left foot is a weak sister, bein' a coward, an' I hev the newrolgy like the mischief. Ever hev the newrolgy?"

"No."

"It's the most p'ison thing out. 'Fore I took it had I was so harn'some ter look upon that I was a powerful fav'rit' with the female sect, but it has so warped me out o' shape that I allow I'm now homely as they make 'em."

The last assertion was not wholly without foundation. Yank Yellowbird was not a handsome man. His face could not boast of symmetry, for his nose was too large, his eyes too small, and his flaxen-brown beard too sparse and erratic of growth; but it was a frank, honest, manly, humorous face, and its owner never sighed for those personal charms which ought to be left to women—delicate features, lily complexion and what else that constitutes "beauty." Yank was too practical to care for these vanities of life, himself, though he could admire a charming young lady as much as any one.

In form he was tall and none too compactly built, if eyesight was to be trusted, but his homely, ill-fitting hunting-suit hid the remarkable muscular development which had no drawback of superfluous flesh. He was past his fiftieth year, but was still a hardy veteran of the woods and mountains, and his agility and strength did not appear to have suffered any diminution.

Texas Tartar was not unconscious of the fact that the hour was growing late, and he once more expressed their anxiety to do what they could for Grizzly George. His life was not in danger, but he seemed likely to be confined to the house for some days, and a doctor would have decided that the bed was the best place for him, and a good nurse necessary.

All this the young man mentioned, but the ex-hunter met the advice impatiently.

"Never mind me," he replied, brusquely. "I'm very grateful ter you fur bringin' me in, as I said afore, an' I hope ter keep up acquaintance with you an' Yank Yellowbird; but fur ter-night I have only one favor ter ask or accept. Jest leave me alone."

"I consait he knows best," Nevermiss agreed, "an' he'll do very wal now. We'll go, Texas, an' call 'round ag'in ter-morrer."

The younger man offered no further objections, but he was by no means easy about Grizzly George.

It was clear that the injured man was meditating revenge, and he might be rash enough to attempt it at any time. If he went out of the house again that night he would not only endanger his life through natural causes, but a very feeble person could get the better of the old borderer as he was then.

His will was law, however, and when they had made him as comfortable as possible, Yank and Texas Tartar left the house.

CHAPTER VII.

STRANGE SCENES OF THE NIGHT.

AN hour previous to the departure of Texas Tartar and Nevermiss from Grizzly George's home, two persons left the Westerley house and walked toward the lake. Their movements were furtive, and everything went to show that they were anxious to avoid observation. Both were females, and they had come from the "big house" like those who lived there.

Their searching gaze failed to discern any other person abroad, and they passed quickly and lightly through the village. Reaching the lake, they kept along the southern shore, and soon reached a high, rough ledge, which was almost a cliff.

Here they sat down in a natural recess, with the lake lying eighty feet below them, and stretching away toward the British Possessions of the north.

One of the girls, for such they were in point of years, breathed a sigh of relief.

"Isn't this better than the close air of the house?" she asked.

"In one way it is, but the danger—think of that, Norma."

"Still afraid! You would never make a heroine."

"I devoutly hope I never shall."

"I am cast in a different mold. With proper encouragement I could become a warrior, I know."

"How can you jest so, Norma? Have you forgotten the events of this evening?"

"If I was foolish, you are a bit severe, my dear Albia. How can I forget?"

"Forgive me; I mean no harm—"

"Certainly you did not, my pretty penitent, and I will not allow you to apologize. We won't mention it. My judgment in coming here is being vindicated every moment. The fresh breeze which sweeps down from the lake cools my blood and clears my mind."

"I hope you will be well to-morrow."

"I shall."

"And your marriage—when will it go on?"

"I shall see Robert to-morrow, of course. Poor fellow! I suppose he was very much alarmed about me, wasn't he? But you have told me that already."

"Let me tell you again. Yes, he was alarmed, and so were all of us. It was so mysterious."

"It was mysterious," was the reply, and the speaker's voice grew hard. "I wish I understood it. People don't fall asleep naturally as I did this evening, and even if they did, they could be awakened. I could not. Why?"

"That is what puzzles me."

"My dear Albia, we must learn."

"How can we?"

"By our wits, or otherwise. The doctor was reserved, but when he gives his promised decision, in the morning, I feel sure that my theories will be sustained; and I say there was a plot to keep me from marrying Robert Kendall. I was never sick a day in my life. Was it natural, then, for me to go into such a state?"

"Certainly not, but what was the cause of it?"

"I don't know what the doctor will say, but I have my own opinion. I think I was drugged."

"Drugged!"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"Now you ask more than I can tell."

"But, Norma, remember that you were in your own home, and surrounded by your best and nearest friends."

"I do not forget it, but my opinion is unshaken. You know what I think, now, and you can imagine how I am puzzled, and how, when I recovered from my strange condition, I found it impossible to be calm, and insisted upon coming here. I have never suspected that I had an enemy, but I believe that some hand was lifted to prevent me from marrying Robert Kendall."

"It is very strange. Who should do it?"

"Yes, who? I ask myself that question in vain. Perhaps Robert has enemies, but they are not inside our house. If it was they, how did they manage to strike at me in my own house? How was I drugged? Who drugged me?"

Norma pressed her hand to her forehead and tried in vain to see light. She had fully recovered from her mysterious indisposition and her mind was clear, but that did not suffice to help her any. There was nothing to begin upon in forming a theory.

Albia watched her curiously, but without hazarding any theory. She found it difficult, for reasons already advanced, to believe all that Norma had asserted. She would not speak plainly, but she attributed everything to natural causes and was concerned for Norma's health.

The silence which had fallen between the two girls remained unbroken for several minutes. Then a sound which was not one of the noises natural to the night arrested Albia's attention. She looked up the lake, and finally spoke nervously:

"Don't you hear something on the water?"

"I had not noticed it until you spoke, but I do."

"What if it is the Horned Fish?" asked Albia, with increased nervousness.

"Nonsense, my dear! It is a boat. Don't you hear the splash of the oars?"

"It may be, but—"

"Still thinking of the lake demon!" retorted Norma, lightly. "Remember that I promised you absolute protection from our belligerent fish."

"And who would protect you?"

"I would protect myself. Albia, you ought to have a part of my confidence. I am afraid I shall never look up to any man with the submissive desire for protection which is supposed to be a female characteristic. I am inclined to protect myself, and I feel all the confidence in the world in my ability to do so successfully."

Albia was accustomed to Miss Westerley's self-confident assertions, and she refrained from making a reply. Instead, she listened eagerly. Her fear that they were about to be confronted by the alleged lake monster had diminished, for the sounds, drawing nearer, had resolved themselves into the unmistakable splash of oars. Yet the noise was faint, and it was plain that skillful hands were wielding the blades.

"They may be the smugglers!" suggested Albia.

"Now you talk to the point. I had thought of that."

"Who else would be out on the lake at this hour?"

"I don't know. Watch and listen—they are almost here. I believe I can see them."

It was no fancy. The boat was very near, and an irregular black spot in the darkness of the night showed where the unknown craft was. At first the girls believed that a landing was to be made near them, but it soon became evident that it was moving in an oblique course along the shore. It began to recede, and soon no visual sign remained of the voyagers.

"If I was a detective, I think I could make a discovery to-night," observed Norma, calmly.

"And learn who the smugglers are?"

"Possibly."

"Why can't we go to the village and give the alarm?"

"It is too late. Every one has retired, and we could only arouse the inmates of our own house; and by the time we did that the smugglers would be gone. Besides, if we did so, I should get severely censured for going out to-night. Let us be philosophical, my dear Albia. The smugglers have never done us harm. Report says they never harm any one, and I am not quite sure that I am their enemy. Their sin against the law is not a great sin, and their bold, free life must be very exciting. I fancy I should make a capital smuggler!"

Albia was shocked, and she did not hesitate to say so. It was not always easy to tell when Miss Westerley was in earnest, and her confident ways were often of a startling nature.

All sounds of oars had died away, but the girls remained at their post, listening and watching. There was an unspoken belief that something more would occur. Perhaps the boat would return; perhaps something more exciting would occur.

This was precisely what did come to pass.

Half an hour had passed when Albia suddenly grasped her companion's arm.

"Some one is coming!" she exclaimed.

"Be calm!" directed Miss Westerley.

There was time to say but little more. Some one certainly was approaching, moving along the shore, and the murmur of voices showed that there was more than one person. Unless something very unusual occurred the girls were not in danger of discovery, but Albia could not fully believe this, and she was trembling with excitement and apprehension.

Nearer came the other night-wanderers, and when they reached a point on a line with the girls, Albia began to take courage. The had only to go a few yards more and they would be well past.

They did not keep on as had been hoped, but paused within fifty feet of the silent watchers, and a ray of light suddenly fell partially upon them. The slide of a "dark-lantern" had been turned, and while one of them held up the object in question, the other produced a package from his pocket.

Both Norma and Albia were watching eagerly, and hardly daring to breathe, but there was little for them to see. The light was as limited in its range as such lights usually are, and neither man's face was brought into plain view. This prevented any positive recognition, but the same idea was in the mind of both girls.

There was something very familiar in the low, cautious voices of the men.

He who held the package unrolled it, and a long white line fluttered down toward the ground. Then both examined it at once, and, though no one sentence could be distinguished, a word drifted to the girls' ears which settled any doubt they might have had.

The object of the men's scrutiny was lace.

Norma watched with growing uneasiness. She had heard the smugglers talked about considerably, and while some persons insisted that jewels and lace were unlawfully carried across the line, others had as stoutly declared that, considering the location of Powderhorn Mile, the idea was absurd.

Now, however, the point seemed settled, and only one question was in Norma's mind. Who were the smugglers? She could not forget the familiarity of the voices, and she was in a state of painful suspense.

Albia suddenly grasped Miss Westerley's arm as the lantern was raised, but neither girl spoke as the light fell plainly on the men's faces. Recognition had then been as swift as it was startling.

The men were David and Edgar Westerley.

It was the younger brother who held the lace, and, as though they had examined it sufficiently, he now rolled it up in the package.

No longer did the hiding girls need to fear molestation; the brothers of one and the friends of the other were at hand; but neither made a move toward revealing their presence. The same inquiry was in the mind of each—What were David and Edgar doing there, and how had they come by the lace?

The ray of light was shut off and the brothers went their way. Conversation could then have been resumed with safety, but it was only after a pause of several seconds that Norma said:

"Come, we will secretly follow them to the house. I wonder where they found the lace? In some nook in the rock, I dare say. Don't you mention it, Albia, but leave it to me to lantern them at the table in the morning. They little suspect what eyes have been upon them."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOCTOR'S STARTLING STATEMENT.

WHEN the Westerley family began to gather, the following morning, each member had one question to ask—"How is Norma?" And the reply invariably was that Norma had sent word from her room that she was entirely recovered. This was good news, but it was a surprise when, after Captain Grandford, David and Edgar had sat down, as they supposed, to a lonely breakfast, Miss Westerley sailed into the dining-room as calmly as though nothing had occurred.

Grandford rose hastily.

"My dear Norma, isn't this reckless?" he asked.

"How so, uncle?"

"Would it not be better for you to keep your room to-day?"

"Not by any means. Let me at once put a veto on the idea of considering me an invalid. I have been indisposed; I am well again. Let that settle it for now. Possibly I will argue with you later."

"What would you say if the doctor was to call now?"

"I should offer to walk with him as far as his house."

"And I should countermand your rash proceeding. After what occurred last night, you must not venture out to-day."

Miss Westerley bestowed a significant glance upon Albia, who had followed her. What would they say if they knew she had been out the night before at such an unhealthy hour. Captain Grandford was firm in a very kind way, and he smiled slightly in response to the expression on Norma's face.

"As usual, youth scorns the wisdom of age," he added, in a serio-comic way.

"Let me add my voice," said David. "The air is not of the best."

"Have you been out?" asked his sister.

"Not this morning."

"When, then?"

"Last night."

"I did not know you were a night-owl."

"I was not out late."

"Were you hunting the Horned Fish?"

"No."

"What did you hunt?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Then you have no great discoveries to report?"

"Not one."

David answered promptly, but Norma observed him look significantly at his brother.

"How disappointing!" she exclaimed. "Didn't you even find a smuggler?"

"No."

"Don't bring another report like that. Should you go out again, I shall expect you to bring me diamonds, or other valuables, freshly captured from the smugglers."

Miss Westerley was giving her brothers all the chance in the world to explain what had happened the previous night, but they did not seem inclined to make any statement.

"It's a poor place around here to look for such things, I fancy," observed David.

"I don't place much faith in these smuggler stories," added Edgar.

"Nor I," agreed Captain Grandford. "But I think we have something more important to speak about. You are looking very well, Norma, but I am all the more puzzled. I don't understand—"

"Suppose we wait until the doctor comes before we try? In any case, let me rest until after breakfast!"

Miss Westerley spoke irritably, and all gave way to her. It was not strange that she should be in such a mood, they thought, and conversation drifted to other subjects. She did not question David and Edgar further. Whatever they had been doing the previous night, they were not inclined to relate their experience. If they had found any smuggled goods, they evidently intended to keep the secret.

Conversation became general and pleasant, though the men were perplexed and not wholly at ease. They had been seriously alarmed about Norma, and the impression was strong in the minds of each that if she had had one such strange attack she was liable to have another. Her present healthy appearance did not seem to promise fully for the future.

Shortly after breakfast the doctor called. His manner was not that of one who calls upon a patient seriously ill, and after a sharp glance at her, he made his greeting in a cheerful voice. Next he made a professional investigation, and then leaned back in his chair.

"How do you find her, doctor?" asked Captain Grandford, anxiously.

"Quite well."

"Then she is really better?"

"She is as well as you or I, captain."

"You please me, even though you do use exaggerated terms."

"Pardon me, but I use nothing of the sort. I said that she was as well as you or I, and I mean it."

"Perhaps," added Miss Westerley, steadily, "you can tell the cause of my mysterious illness?"

"I can."

"And what was it?"

"You were drugged!"

Norma was the only one in the room who did not look surprised, and Captain Grandford repeated the doctor's last word in amazement.

"Drugged!" he cried.

"Exactly."

"Are you crazy, Wimple?"

"Not dangerously so, my dear captain. Let me come to the point at once. When I first saw the young lady last evening, in her insensible state, I promptly recognized the fact that all the indications were to the effect that she had been put into her profound slumber by a drug. I did not mention it then, for I really could not see how this could have been done. That she would take the drug knowingly was an absurd idea; that she would, or could, be drugged in her own home was equally wild. Hence, I worked over her and said nothing."

"Yet you still hold the opinion?"

"Yes. Before I went away, I saw her gradually recover just as she would from a drugged sleep. I was satisfied that all danger was past, and her present condition confirms that idea. I regret that the limited means open to me in this wild border town do not give me a chance to learn just what drug was used, but you know I am not yet fully established. I have no means of analysis, and nothing to analyze."

"My good man, you surely must be away off," asserted Grandford.

"How so?"

"Why should any one drug Norma?"

"That I don't know."

"No outsider could have done it, and, surely, you don't mean to say that any inmate of this house would do it?"

"Captain, I don't presume to judge on these points. I am a doctor, not a detective. I have given my professional verdict, and you can rely upon its being accurate in every way. Beyond that the case rests in your hands. It is for you to decide who drugged Miss Westerley, and what the motive was."

"But I can't believe anything of the kind."

"I can, and do!"

The speaker was Norma, and her utterance was steady and calm.

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"I told Albia, last night, just what Doctor Wimple has now said. I felt sure of it, even if I was not a medical person. You know that I have always had the best of health. Such an experience as mine can be accounted for in only one way—I was drugged!"

"But who should drug you?"

"I don't know."

"What object could any one have?"

"I can only infer that it was to prevent my marriage to Robert Kendall."

"Who could wish to prevent it?"

"Now you ask too much, Uncle Lloyd. I am wholly at a loss to know, though it may be that Robert can throw some light upon the mystery. I don't know who the guilty party was, nor how the work was accomplished."

"Kendall should be seen at once," observed Wimple.

"He is coming now," said Albia, who was sitting by the window.

"Then, with your permission, captain, I will remain and hear what he has to say," added the doctor.

"Certainly. We want this mystery cleared up, if possible. I am still reluctant to believe, but if I find that your theory is correct, the guilty scoundrel shall have all the law that Powderhorn Mile can muster!"

Grandford spoke with emphasis. Norma was his sister's child, and had always been his favorite, and the idea of a drug having been given her aroused all his anger.

"With your permission, I will question Kendall," continued Wimple.

"Do so, doctor."

Robert Kendall entered, tall, strong and handsome. Wimple gave him due chance to greet his betrothed, to inquire after her health and express his pleasure at finding her so well; and then pleasure gave way to business.

"Mr. Kendall, have you an enemy?" asked the doctor, abruptly.

Robert started, flushed and looked at David Westerley. The latter believed that the glance was a silent inquiry whether he had told them about Grizzly George's charges, so David shook his head. Kendall meditated a moment, and then replied:

"I presume I have enemies."

He knew that he might as well admit as much, for if George's story was not already public, it might become so at any moment.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GOVERNMENT OFFICER'S BOMBSHELL.

DOCTOR WIMPLE's face cleared.

"Ah! and what enemies have you?" he asked.

"I have given no one cause to be so," answered Kendall. "I spoke on general grounds, only."

"Is there any one who would wish to prevent you from marrying Miss Westerley?"

"No."

The young man spoke heartily, not remembering for a moment that Grizzly George's grudge might take just that form.

"Do you know of any other man who aspires to marry Miss Westerley?"

"I have thought that about all the single men in Powderhorn Mile had that ambition."

"Don't speak in general terms. Do you know any particular one?"

"No."

"Has any one shown ill will to you, since your marriage was announced as a sure thing of the future?"

"No."

"Is there any other girl who has a fancy for you?"

"Decidedly not."

Kendall was uneasy under this questioning, for Grizzly George was all the while in his mind, but he controlled himself outwardly and seemed to answer with great frankness.

"May I ask what all this means?" he added.

Wimple saw no reason for making a mystery out of the affair with Kendall, and he explained with all possible clearness. He only served to perplex Robert as much as the others. The latter saw at once that the interruption to the marriage could not be laid at Grizzly George's door; the means employed were wholly unlike the ex-hunter's natural course of conduct.

George was not the man, rough and headstrong as he was, to strike in such a subtle way as through the medium of a drug. Moreover, there could be no gain for him in a temporary postponement of the marriage.

Clearly, the ex-hunter was to be counted out.

A general consultation took place. Norma agreed with the doctor so firmly that no one ventured to assert that the theory was incorrect, and all attention was given to solving the double puzzle—who had done the drugging, and how had it been done?

The inquiry ended where it had begun; not the slightest light had been shed upon the mystery, and no one had conceived a theory which seemed plausible even to the originator.

Wimple gave up in despair, at length, and took his departure. He did not intend to let the matter drop there, but he was wise enough to realize that he might be in the way.

He dryly advised great care when the hour of the wedding again arrived, and then left them to set the hour without an outsider near.

This was just what they proceeded to do, and, as no one had a word to say to the contrary, it was decided that the marriage should take place that evening. Captain Grandford observed that it would be absurd to call the guests together again, and the ceremony was set down as a quiet one.

David Westerley seized the first chance to speak with Kendall privately.

"May I make a suggestion, Robert?" he asked.

"Most certainly."

"Wouldn't it be prudent to tell Norma about George Hendricks's absurd charge before you are married?"

"Yes; and that is just what I intend to do. There must be no secrets between us. I am as innocent as you are, for Eve Hendricks, though a splendid girl, never had any especial attraction for me; but as George is liable to put ugly rumors afloat, Norma must not become my wife in ignorance. I will tell her all within this hour."

"Good! You show your usual good sense, Robert."

David looked at Edgar and was about to suggest that they go out, but at that moment heavy steps sounded outside the room and the door was flung open. Two persons were revealed. One was a female servant, who looked frightened and worried, and the other was Charles Tabor, the Government officer.

The latter had undergone a great and surprising change since he talked with Grandford the previous night. He was now pale and haggard, and his neck was covered with a rude bandage; while his garments were damp and mud-covered. Everything went to show that the smuggler-hunter had met with rough usage, and he looked to be a fit subject for the hospital.

Captain Grandford arose with an astonished expression on his face.

"I couldn't stop him!" exclaimed the servant.

"No; I wasn't to be stopped by any human power!" declared Tabor, huskily.

"What in the world has happened to you?" demanded Grandford.

"It came near being death."

"Death from what?"

"The hounds of the smugglers!"

"Did you meet them?"

"I should say I did! Don't this answer?" and he touched his bandaged neck. "If not, I have other wounds to show. If they are not enough, go look on the bodies of Craver and Wells!"

"Their bodies?"

"That's what I said."

"Do you mean—"

"My two companions found the smugglers, to their sorrow. Craver and Wells are dead!"

He spoke with savage vehemence, and consternation fell upon his hearers. Norma and

Albia grew pale, while Grandford and the younger men looked startled.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the captain.

"Go look on the dead officers and see."

"But the smugglers are not supposed to be fighting men."

"They are not; they are assassins."

"What do you mean?"

"They laid an ambush for us, and shot Craver and Wells dead at the first fire. That I escaped is not due to their mercy, and you see my condition. I have three bullet-wounds."

"Do you say they ambushed you?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the Point of Pines."

"But how did they know of your movements?"

Tabor flung up his arm with a fierce gesture.

"That is just what I want to know. The smugglers knew of our plans—it was no chance encounter. We were hiding quietly, yet they crept upon us and were ready to butcher us at the proper moment. They knew of our plans; knew that we had gone to the Point of Pines; and, like you, I ask how they knew about our movements."

"You must have told some one."

"I did."

"Well, I should say that person betrayed you."

"Just my idea."

"Whom did you tell?"

The Government officer drew himself up to his full height. His face was flushed, and his eyes blazed with savage emotion. He was greatly excited, and his manner was dramatic in the extreme. The moment had come for the grand revelation, and his voice unconsciously grew lower, but it was full of intensity as he replied:

"I am not in the habit of telling official secrets, and I told of this affair only once. No one knew that Craver, Wells and I were coming to Powderhorn Mile until we were here; and no human being knew that we were going to the Point of Pines last night except three men whom I told on the lake-shore!"

Tabor ceased speaking and slowly folded his arms. Captain Grandford looked at him with a surprised expression.

"Do you mean me?"

"You were the man I told, but you were not alone at that time. You had two companions, and I see them here present."

"David and Robert," muttered Grandford, like one speaking mechanically.

Tabor nodded shortly.

"Excuse me," interrupted David, "but your words have a peculiar drift. What are we to understand?"

"It is clear," returned the officer steadily, "that my party was betrayed. Word was somehow conveyed to the smugglers that we were going to lie in wait at the Point of Pines, and they ambushed us there and murdered my associates. Now, who gave them their information? I repeat that nobody knew of our intentions until we told them in the presence of you three. Captain Grandford, you are above suspicion. Do you vouch for your companions who heard my statement?"

A bewildered look was on the face of the gray-haired ex-soldier, but it suddenly gave place to a deep flush, as though the full purport of Tabor's insinuations had just broken upon him.

"Vouch for them?" he repeated quickly.

"Ay! that I do; I vouch for them to the furthest limit. They are the personification of honor."

Tabor remained unmoved.

"One is your nephew, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Who is the other?"

"He will marry my niece to-day."

"How long have you known him?"

"A year."

"What do you know of his past?"

"Wait!" interrupted Robert Kendall, somewhat curtly. "I do not feel flattered by your insinuations, Mr. Tabor, but an honest man need have no fear. I will freely give you a full account of my life."

"It is Captain Grandford's account, not yours, that I want," rudely replied the Government officer.

Kendall flushed, but waved his hand in quiet acquiescence.

"As you will, sir," he answered temperately.

CHAPTER X.

THE SHERIFF HAS SERIOUS BUSINESS.

OFFICER TABOR had aroused feelings anything but kindly among his hearers. He had made a serious charge, and, wherever he saw fit to place the blame, every one in the room was likely to be indignant.

As it was, he was the focus of glances which might have worried a timid man. Norma looked at him with scorn, while Albia, though more frightened than anything else, already regarded him as a serpent that had come into their Eden.

Captain Grandford gathered himself for a struggle.

"If I understand you correctly, Mr. Tabor," he said, "you assert that one of us three gave information to the smugglers which led to such lamentable results?"

"There is no other way to look at it; but you are beyond suspicion, captain."

"You might as well accuse me as these young men, in whom I feel a father's interest."

"I do not accuse your nephew, sir."

"And I," retorted David, "refuse to be let out at the expense of Robert Kendall."

"Have no fear," quietly added Robert. "I am innocent, and I do not fear the charge."

"Where is your proof?" demanded David.

"Never fear; I shall find it."

"I defy you!" calmly asserted the accused man.

"Wait!" directed Grandford. "Let us consider the matter logically. How do you know that the men who fired upon you were smugglers?"

"We proceeded to the Point of Pines, as I told you we should do, and lay in wait for the smugglers' boat. It appeared, and I commanded its occupants to halt in the name of law. Instantly a voice behind us shouted that Government spies could not rule there, and, almost in the same breath, the speaker gave the order to fire. It was obeyed, and Craver and Wells fell dead. It is plain that the smugglers knew of our journey to the Point of Pines, and deliberately ambushed us."

"But they have never before been known to commit violence."

"Possibly they were never so hard pressed."

"I cannot regard them as desperate men. This vicinity is not the place for the smuggling of really valuable things, for the reason that the country on the other side is so wild and unsettled."

"Excuse me, but I have looked into this closer than you, sir. I insist that very valuable articles are brought over the line—for instance, jewels and laces."

Norma and Albia flashed a quick glance at each other, and their expressions became more startled. They had not forgotten the boat they had seen on the lake, and pronounced a smuggler craft; nor had they forgotten the scene when David and Edgar examined the lace, the previous night, under cover of the cliff. The same thought was in the mind of each; it was well that Tabor did not know of that affair.

"I suppose you ought to know best," responded Grandford, reluctantly.

"I understand the case pretty well; it has been my study for some weeks. I am sure a cargo was landed near here last night. Perhaps it was jewels; perhaps something else. Had it not been for treachery, this would have been the smugglers' last venture."

"You have made a serious charge—"

"The blood of Craver and Wells cries aloud for vengeance."

"And I am selected for a victim!" severely observed Kendall.

"No injustice shall be done you."

"It has been done me already. Where is your proof? Have you no more evidence than that I heard your communication to Captain Grandford?"

"Not at present."

"I don't think such evidence will go in law."

"Don't fear but I will have more."

"Go ahead—do your utmost. Your charge would be absurd were it not so serious. I shall not quarrel with you, sir, for I have no doubt that you mean well; but you are about as far off the track as any man can be. My whole life is open to your inspection, and I defy you to find one thing that would seem to place me in line with law-breakers of any kind."

"Well said, Robert!" exclaimed Grandford, heartily.

"No one doubts you," added David.

"Speak for yourself!" retorted Tabor, irritably.

"Uncle!" cried Norma.

"Yes?"

"If this gentleman's business is ended, I think he had better go."

No one seemed to care to join with Miss Westerley in her bold views.

"I thank you for your good will, young lady," returned Tabor, with a poorly-disguised sneer.

"I do not thank you for insulting all of us in our house. Were I a man," added the girl, with flashing eyes, "I would not sit here and hear you tamely!"

"Mr. Tabor is an officer of law, my dear," said Grandford, hastily.

"Even he has no right to insult us when, as he admits, he has no proof."

A knock sounded at the door. Grandford mechanically bade the applicant enter, and as the door swung back the female servant was again revealed. She looked more worried than ever, and an attempt to speak was a dismal failure. A man stood beside her, however, and he entered the room uninvited. All of the inmates of the Westerley house recognized him as one Job Troy, a man the citizens had dignified with the title of sheriff.

Mr. Troy now seemed to be in a perturbed state of mind, and he removed his hat and stood

bowing in a manner even more flurried than that of the servant-girl.

"I hope, cap'n, you'll overlook my intrusion," he muttered, rather indistinctly.

"Don't mention it, Troy. Have you come on business?"

"I think so—yes, I may say that I have."

"What is it?"

Grandford was on good terms with the sheriff, but his visit was certainly inopportune, and the captain wanted to get through with him as soon as possible.

"It's unpleasant," observed Troy, gloomily.

"Do you want to see me privately?"

"No, sir; thank ye. In fact, it ain't you I want ter see."

"Who is it?"

"Him!"

The sheriff pointed to Robert Kendall, and then made a series of gestures, the meaning of which was uncertain, unless he wished to convey further apology.

"What do you wish?" asked Kendall, absently.

"I'm hyar to arrest you!"

The words fell with painful force upon the ears of every one except Tabor, and Kendall looked very much astonished.

"Arrest me!" he exclaimed.

"I'm obliged ter."

"Upon what charge?"

"Sault an' battery on Grizzly George, alias George Hendricks," replied Troy, getting more and more confused.

"What nonsense is this?" demanded the accused man. "I have not touched Grizzly George. Are you crazy?"

His sharpness angered Troy, and did more than anything else to restore his composure.

"George lays over in his shanty, a good 'eal pounded ter pieces, an' he says you did it. Mebbe you know best, but it seems ter me he ought ter be posted some on the case!"

Robert Kendall began to feel despair. Guilty or innocent, the storm-clouds were gathering thickly around him, and hemming him in on all sides, and it seemed that he was doomed to be crushed, do what he might. He faced the sheriff boldly, however.

"When did this happen?" he asked.

"Last night."

"At what hour?"

"Don't know; but it was pretty late."

"And does George Hendricks charge me with having assaulted him?"

"Yes."

"It is false! I never laid an unfriendly hand upon him in my life."

"That ain't fur me ter say. You'll have yer trial in due time, o' course, an' then the consan' the pros will both have a chance. All I have ter do about it is ter take you in, an' I must do my duty. Grizzly George is pretty bad banged up, an' sorter out o' his head, but he keeps accusin' you o' bein' the one who sot outter him an' hurted him. That ain't all he accuses ye of," added the sheriff, significantly.

Robert's face flushed deeply; something which did not escape the notice of observing eyes.

"Am I to be arrested on the mutterings of a man who, as you confess, is delirious?" Kendall retorted.

"I believe you have got the right clew, sheriff," interrupted Tabor. "Do your duty!"

"Sir," promptly returned the accused man, "only the presence of ladies prevents me from rewarding your interference as it deserves!"

"As you did to Craver and Wells, for instance," sneered the Government officer.

"Troy," exclaimed Captain Grandford, "you are all wrong in this matter. It is absurd to charge Robert with the crime. Why should he harm Grizzly George?"

"I can explain ef you want, but it ain't pleasant," doggedly replied Troy. "Ef George's mutterings are ter be believed, Kendall won the affections of Eve Hendricks an' then deserted her. Nobody will b'lieve anything but good o' the girl, but she left a letter sayin' that somebody had trifled with her heart, an' it was that which drove her to suicide. Grizzly George 'lows that he intended ter have satisfaction, an' he did accuse Kendall, but the latter was too quick fur him. I reckon you see now what motive Kendall had fur gettin' the fu'st rap at Hendricks!"

CHAPTER XI.

TEXAS TARTAR BECOMES A WITNESS.

THE story was told at last, and the charges which had been accumulating against Robert Kendall were public property. He was at once accused of being an ally of the smugglers and party to the murder of Craver and Wells; of having driven Eve Hendricks to her death; and of having attempted to kill Grizzly George.

What an accusation for a bride-elect to hear!

Kendall thought only of that, and he turned his gaze upon Norma. He had never wavered in his determination to tell her what George had said at their late interview, before the marriage took place; but he had been forestalled, and Miss Westerley had heard that charge, and all the others, in the worst possible form.

He had expected to see her shrink away from

a man thus trebly accused, but he had wronged her. Norma Westerley was nothing if not loyal, and one glance at her brave, defiant face showed him that her confidence was unshaken.

He turned to the sheriff with new calmness and firmness.

"I deny this, as I deny all that has gone before. I knew Eve Hendricks, but she and I were never more than friends. I defy any one to prove to the contrary, for not one word of love ever passed between us. Is there more to be said against me? You cannot well add to what you have heaped upon me."

"Since I entered the house," vindictively observed Tabor, "I have seen proof of all I suspected as to your character."

David Westerley stepped quickly forward and touched the speaker on the arm.

"You have said enough, sir!" he sternly exclaimed. "I will not hear any more from you. You have offered no proof of your own charges, and they are an insult to all of us. In most cases the quietest way is the best, but you have forfeited all claim to forbearance. Curb your venomous propensities, or you will be ordered from the house!"

"Thrown out, you mean!" added Edgar, bitterly.

Tabor's eyes glittered, but he knew enough not to brave the storm he had started. Without a word he turned away and stood by the door, grim and silent.

"I'm sorry," said Troy, awkwardly, "but I shall have ter take Mr. Kendall to jail."

"I shall yield, of course," Kendall answered.

"Give me time, however, to say a few words to my friends."

"All you want!" heartily declared Troy, who was a very good-hearted fellow, really.

Kendall looked toward Charles Tabor.

"I think we can dispense with this person's company," he remarked.

"We certainly can," David agreed.

Tabor gave them an angry glance.

"I've no more to say now," he returned, "and I shall know where to look for Kendall when I want him. I will not degrade myself by any further talk. When I came here I thought to have the sympathy of all honest, law-abiding persons, but I have been shown my error of judgment. My reception awakens certain new theories. I will go, but you shall hear from me again!"

He marched angrily out of the room. Captain Grandford arose with some trepidation, and called after him, but Tabor did not stop. He was soon out of the house.

A general conversation then took place. Sheriff Troy told how Grizzly George had been found alone in his little house, wounded and in bad condition. He had talked very freely, but, queer as his manner was, no one had decided that he was out of his head until Doctor Wimple so pronounced him.

It was George's charges that had led to the arrest. He had accused Kendall of assaulting him, and had told a story sufficiently connected to start Troy on his present errand.

Kendall then denied all connection with the affair. He repeated what he had said about Eve, and denied ever harming her father. He spoke of meeting the ex-hunter on the lake-shore and called upon David to corroborate his statement that George had left them uninjured.

David did this heartily, but there was one unpleasant recollection in his mind which he did not relate. It will be remembered that, shortly after George left them, the two young men had separated, and that David, looking back, saw Kendall walking in the direction just taken by Grizzly George.

This recollection gave David some uneasiness, and he decided to keep the fact to himself. It could be only chance, he thought, that took his friend in that direction, but an enemy could twist it into a serious bit of circumstantial evidence.

When Troy was asked how George got to his own house, if he was assaulted outside, he replied that the ex-hunter was carried there by two new-comers to the village, Texas Tartar and Yank Yellowbird, who had found him lying helpless after the attack.

"They are the guilty persons!" exclaimed Norma.

"Who?" asked Troy.

"The men you mentioned."

"Why, bless you! Miss Westerley, Yank Yellowbird is one of the most honestest men alive. I've heard on him fur years."

"So have I," added Grandford.

"Well, what about the other person? What did you call him?"

"Texas Tartar."

"A fine name for an honest man!" declared Miss Westerley, scornfully.

"It's a Western fancy," explained Troy.

"There is too much of the fanciful about it. Who is the man? What is he like? Wait!—you need not answer. David, I want your secret; I am going to visit this Texas Tartar!"

"Impossible, Norma! Consider how—"

"I will hear your objections after our return; this is no time for idle talk. I want to talk with these men who found Hendricks, and I am not to be turned from my purpose. Will you

accompany me, Sir Donald, or shall I enlist Albia as my defender?"

Miss Westerley spoke imperiously, and when she assumed that manner she always ruled. Everybody obeyed her, and they found it a pleasure. As a princess she would have been a decided success, and though not a princess, she had the most devout and faithful of followers.

"Norma may learn something of importance," suggested Albia, with unusual courage.

The idea was a happy one, and all caught at the hope that Texas Tartar and Yank Yellowbird might be able to tell something of importance. Troy agreed to delay taking Kendall away to jail until Norma and David had performed their errand, and sister and brother soon left the house.

Troy had told them where to find the men, and they went at once to the hotel. David conducted Norma to the ladies' parlor, and then went to look for the strangers. He succeeded so well that, at the end of five minutes, he returned accompanied by Texas Tartar and Yank.

Norma still had hostile feelings toward them, and would have it that it was they who assaulted Grizzly George, but the first view of the men caused her to waver. She was too good a judge of human nature to fail to be impressed by the mountaineer's honest face, while Texas Tartar had an appearance to which no woman could be indifferent. David introduced them formally. It was Yank who spoke first.

"Happy ter see you, miss," he observed, "an' hope we kin be o' use ter you. I'll let Texas, hyar, do the talkin', fur I'm nat'rally retirin' an' not much given ter words. Texas will tell ye all, an' I'll back up what he says. I'll amoose myself in the lapsus by attendin' ter my new-rology, which is oncommon voy'lent—but then, o' course you don't keer fur sech an egregious small side-issue."

The mountaineer nodded genially and withdrew to a seat by the window.

"I am at your service, Miss Westerley," said Texas Tartar, politely.

"I will come to the point at once, sir. I am told that you and your friend are the men who found George Hendricks after his injury?"

"Quite true."

"May I ask you for particulars?"

"Certainly. The main facts are very simple. We found the man by chance, as he lay insensible upon the ground. I recognized him, and we carried him to his house, where he regained consciousness. We both advised him to have a doctor, but he would not listen to us. We dressed his wounds as well as possible, and then left him alone."

"What was said about his assailant?"

"He claimed to know who it was, but refused to tell."

"Did he say that he saw the man?"

"No. He said that he did not seem him plainly, and did not see him at all until the first blow was struck. The old man was hit before he knew there was danger."

"Are you sure he said that he did not see his assailant plainly?"

"I am."

"David, isn't this a great point gained?" asked Miss Westerley.

"Certainly it is."

"I can add more," continued Texas Tartar. "The wounded man said that the blow dazed him—I use his own term."

"Better still. A dazed man is not the person to give authentic evidence."

"Grizzly George did not once claim that he recognized his assailant, but he declared that he knew who it was. Also, he said the case was a peculiar one, though he did not explain in what way."

"There is absolutely no evidence against Robert Kendall," declared Norma. "Am I not right, David?"

"We know of none," cautiously replied young Westerley, "but I am afraid there will be a good deal of trouble for Robert."

His thoughts had gone back to the time when George accused Kendall, and there seemed ground for grave fears.

CHAPTER XII.

YANK COMES TO THE FRONT.

TEXAS TARTAR had shown unusual interest in the subject from the first, and he now added:

"If you will allow a friendly-inclined man a question, may I ask if it is not this same Robert Kendall against whom Tabor, the Government officer, is making a charge?"

"It is the same man," David admitted.

"Is Kendall guilty?"

"Decidedly not, sir."

"He seems beset by troubles."

"Yes."

"You may think me forward, but friend Yellowbird and I will help you if we can. I am an idle man with some knowledge of the West, while as for Yank, he is known everywhere as a shrewd, brave mountaineer—"

Yank arose and came hastily forward.

"I hope you'll overlook Texas Tartar's exaggerated flights o' speech," he interrupted. "Youth will have its flights an' its pranks, an' I can't l'arn Texas that a plain old hunter like me can't bear sech enconicorns handily. Thar

was a time when I's young an' frisky, myself, an' I kept up the Yellowbird record in a way credible ter the fam'ly pedigree, but what kin you expect o' a man who's bein' chased inter old age by chronic newrology an' other malignant complaints?"

"For a venerable wreck," retorted David, catching the veteran's humorous fancy, "you are a very good specimen. I'll wager something there isn't a man in Powderhorn Mile that could match you in muscle, or quickness of motion."

"You understand our eccentric friend well," added Texas Tartar. "He has long been one of the foremost scouts of the West, and his strength and agility are unimpaired; while his hands are as steady, and his eyes as keen, as ever. He may be past his fiftieth year, as he says, but he looks a good six years younger, and he is still the same old Yank who won the sobriquet of 'Nevermiss' by his deadly aim when firing a rifle."

The mountaineer shook his head gravely.

"You mean wal, I consait, but ye let yer good will ter me run away with your jedgment. I'm the weakest vessel in the Yellowbird fam'ly. By hurley! you ought ter seen some o' my ancestors. There was my female cousin who got out a patent on writin' poetry. She was smarter than a Sioux Injun, an' as pooty as a lillock in full bloom. 'Twas a great idee o' hern gittin' poetry patented. She got a monopoly on the market, an' the way she reeled off verses was amazin'. Dunno how she could do it, by hurley! but I s'pose 'twas born in her. That's only one thing I ever found which was more soothin' than ter hear her read a poem, an' that was ter run the gantlet 'mong the Sioux, or Kimanche Injuns."

"You seem to have survived both," observed Texas Tartar.

"Yas, in a measure; but it was all owin' ter plenty o' exercise in my youth. My gran'father, the Revolutionary relict, used ter put me thru' the military tick-tacks reg'lar. The systum was pooty severe, as showed up by my gran'father—his name was Zadoc Obadiah Yellowbird, by the way—an' I've always b'en glad I didn't enlist in the Revolutionary disturbance, though I's mortal 'feerd I'd been drawn inter it ef I'd been born fifty year sooner. He had sev'ral scars, my gran'father did; an' as he wa'n't mean nor selfish, he tried ter give me my share by whalin' me over the legs with a stick like hurley. This was ter distill the tick-tacks inter me thorough."

"You evidently endured a good deal in your boyhood."

"It wa'n't an oita ter the egregious diffikilties that come later—not an oita. I've been through more triberlations an' distresses than most folks have. Mebbe the wu'st was when I's a baby, though, fur the old women from fur an' nigh—especially nigh—used ter gather by the score ter look at me in my cradle. Ef thar is any one thing that ought ter be put down it is the annoyin' o' babies by old ladies—it had, sure's you're alive. What crime has the babies done that the venerable, old, aged females should harass their youth? Be babies made ter be looked at with malev'lent cur'osity like a two-headed cow, or a bearded woman, or a bald-headed man, or a freckled gal in a circus? I consait not! No, by hurley!"

The mountaineer smote his knee with his hand, and looked around with mild indignation at his hearers. Then, leveling his long forefinger at Texas Tartar, he shook it gravely and added:

"But my troubles didn't eend when I got over bein' a baby, an' recovered my abnormal strength. I had ter tackle corns, measles, weasels, numps, bumbs, thumps an' war-whoop cough; I had ter larn ter smoke; an', by gracious, I had ter go courtin'. That was the wu'st o' all. I consait I never'd got inter it only my marm set me a-goin'. She'd been through the process an' liked it. All gals do; they take to courtin' nat'ral; but it is p'ison unpleasant ter the boys."

The veteran shook his head and heaved a deep sigh.

"I went inter it strong, though, fur no Yellowbird was ever half-hearted yit. I knowed a pooty gal named Araminta Ann Flicker, an' I axed her ter go skatin' with me one evenin', on the river. All the young folks congregated thar 'bout ev'ry night, an' 'twas said ter be mortal good fun. Now, I never had had a skate on in my life, but it looked an easy thing ter do, an' I s'pected ter git along all right."

"Evenin' come an' out we went, skates an' all. Araminta said the evenin' was lovely, an' I consait it was, though I didn't notice. Not knowin' fur sure, I didn't make no answer. In fact, I was so egregious frustrated by bein' escorted to a pooty gal that I couldn't think o' nothin' important ter say, anyhow. I knelt down, an' arter a powerful sight of pullin' an' jerkin', finally got on myskates. Then I looked up an' seen Araminta standin' stock still, holdin' her skates."

"Ain't ye ready?" sez I.

"I'm waitin' fur you," sez she.

"But yer skates ain't on," sez I.

"I'm waitin' fur you ter put 'em on," sez she.

"Land o' Goshen! ye can't 'magine what a creepy shiver that sent up an' down my back-bone."

"Can't ye put 'em on yerself?" sez I.

"Sir!" sez she.

"I seen right away she was mad, though what I'd done I didn't know; but I observed sev'ral other fellers strappin' on skates fur their gals, an' down I got on my knees. Texas, I never had sech a p'ison time in my life. Ter begin with, that gal's feet wa'n't bigger nor a good-sized caterpillar, an' how a skate could hang ter them I dunno; an' nex'tly, I was so flustered I lost my mechanical dexterity, an' couldn't git the hang o' the atrocious skates fur some time. Arter gittin' one on wrong eend front, I finally finished the job an' tried ter git up, but embarrassment had started the praspiration on me like the mischief, an' it had run down ter my knees an' froze my trowsers ter the ice. I had ter pull like hurley ter git up, but I did it."

"Do you skate wal?" sez my gal, in a sort o' dubious way.

"Beautiful!" sez I.

"You don't seem ter understand puttin' on skates very well," sez she.

"Oh, yes, I do!" sez I; "but my fingers are so condemn'd cold," sez I, "they're sorter clumsy."

"Wal, le's strike out," sez she.

"Ye-e-es," sez I, tremblin'; "come on!"

"With that I threw out one foot as I'd seen my Uncle Peltiah's yarler boss do when pawin' fur oats, but I forgot ter take t'other foot along with me, an' I sot down with one foot at the scratch—that's tecknerkil fur the startin'-p'int, Texas—an' t'other several yards up the river. It hurt me like hurley, but I riz up quick an' observed, as chipper as I could, that I was tryin' the ice ter see how hard 'twas."

"Araminta Ann, she looked skeptkerl, but she didn't say nothin' mean—not jest then. We took another start, an' I tried ter keep my feet 'long with me; but, land o' Goshen! it did beat all natur' how things did go. Them skates was wuss than a yearlin' colt ter handle, an' they would persist in shootin' off on trips o' their own, an' it was all I could do ter keep anywhar nigh Araminta."

"She was patient an' forbearin', the gal was; an' though she began ter laugh egregious, she stuck to me faithful, an' even helped me up three or four times when I fell down. I never was so mortified in my life, an' fur 'bout ten minutes it looked dub'us which would win, the skates or me; but the climax finally come all on a sudden. One o' my feet shot out promise'us an' ketched ag'in' Araminta's foot, an' then down we both went. I fell fu'st, an' I'll be condemn'd ef that gal didn't sit right down on my stummick, and knock all the breath out o' me fur 'bout ten mirutes! When I got up I stood stock still."

"Shall we go on ag'in?" sez Araminta.

"I consait not," sez I.

"Hev you had exercise enough?" sez she, snickerin'.

"I hev, by hurley!" sez I.

"It's early ter go home," sez she.

"You kin stay," sez I, "but this ain't no place fur me. I ain't wal," sez I. "My stummick is all smashed to bits, an' the pain is horrible ter contemplate. Stay ef you want ter," sez I, "but as fur me I'd rather hev out a double tooth an' lead three-year-old steer, than canter 'round on these condemn'd skates. Good-night," sez I; "I'm goin' home ter my marm!"

"With that I yanked off them skates mortal quick, an' when I got my own feet under me ag'in, I made fur home. I had an egregious pain left, but my marm dosed me on peppermint tea, an' I come out on't arter awhile, but I never had on no skates arterwards!"

Yank shook his head in strong condemnation of the articles in question, and then turned abruptly to Norma.

"Thar are some ways I ain't so green," he added. "I've follered trails fur a good thirty odd year, and when I'm at it the Yellowbird pedigree will tell. Ef you say the word, I'll look inter this tangled case o' young Kendall's an' see what the diffikilty is."

"Do you mean it?" she cried.

"I sartainly do."

"But we are strangers to you."

"True, but we're gittin' acquainted. It's a maxim o' the Yellowbirds never ter see folks in trouble without helpin' 'em out. I consait I never yit hung back in a good cause, an' Texas Tartar is o' the same sort. The Man with Nine Lives, they call him, because he's so egregious hard ter down in a skrimmage."

"We shall be glad to aid you," added Yank's partner.

"An' then thar is my dog, Moses," continued the mountaineer. "He ain't ter be sneezed at."

"My dear sir, we shall be delighted to have your assistance," said David.

"And the name of Yank Yellowbird is a guarantee of success," supplemented Norma gratefully.

"We'll do our best, little woman."

"Where will you begin?"

"Can't say until we look the field over."

"Work your own way, but if you can clear Robert Kendall you shall be well rewarded."

"Don't say that. Our firm don't keer fur gold an' silver an' medals, but we're always glad ter give honest folks a boost. Cheer up, gal, fur we'll soon be movin', an' I feel sartain we shall l'arn somethin' o' value—I do, by hurley."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PACKAGE FOUND IN THE STORE-ROOM.

WHEN Norma and David left the house they were in a mood more hopeful than when they went to call upon Texas Tartar and Yank. Both the Westerleys had expressed unwavering faith in Robert Kendall, and Norma, at least, was sincere; and Kendall's cause, with the mountaineer and his friend back of it, did not seem so cheerless as before.

Texas Tartar and Yank, left alone, looked at each other questioningly.

"Well, what do you think?" asked the former.

"I think we're in the game, without the least move on our part," Yank answered.

"We are certainly on the outskirts, but are we in with any of the real parties?"

"You've heerd Tabor's charges."

"Tabor is a fool!" retorted Texas Tartar.

"To be sure. I wouldn't give much fur his opinion, but he does figger it out pooty plausible as ter the Point o' Pines ambush. I make bold ter say the smugglers did some way git news o' his movements. Now, who give him away—Kendall, Dave Westerley or Grandford?"

"The three may be leagued with the smugglers."

"You furgit their high respectableness."

"Hang their respectability!" returned The Man with Nine Lives. "Respectability is a fraud. The worst rascals in the land are sot painted over with the varnish of respectability that their real natures don't show. We mus, discriminate, Nevermiss, between this quality which is only one of the surface, and real honesty."

"Land o' Goshen! ef that ain't a choice artom o' pheelosophy, I dunno what ye would call it! You remind me o' gran'father, Jairus Nickodemus Yellowbird, the Revolutionary relict. He was given ter deep study an' obtuse p'int. The only difference is, you take ter pheelosophy an' he took ter tick-tacks."

"Your grandfather was as wise as all the rest of the Yellowbirds. But about our course. Have you any plan?"

"Sev'ral p'int present theirselves ter me."

"Name them."

"Thar is an artom o' hope that a visit to the Point o' Pines might be o' value. The ambushers may have left tracks."

"A good idea, Yank."

"Don't git too sanguine. Ef thar are many pine trees there, an' needles from the aforesaid trees scattered thick around, trillin' skill won't amount ter much."

"Let us hope for the best. What next?"

"Next, I consait we'll do wal ter look fur the Horned Fish. Usually I don't take ter fishin', but this partic'lar fish seems ter have oncommon p'int."

"Suppose we defer our visit to the Point of Pines until afternoon, and then, when once there, remain until dark, and see what sights the lake will furnish?"

"A good idee."

"Very well, then. We will pass the forenoon in looking and listening here. There is bound to be considerable excitement when Robert Kendall's arrest is made known, and the citizens will think more of Tabor's charge that the young man is an ally of the smugglers, than of the Grizzly George assault case. If we listen to all these men, we may catch some remark that will put us on the track."

"You've got it down fine, I see. Takes a detective fur sech del'cate p'int."

"Softly, Nevermiss, softly! Don't apply the word 'detective' to me again while we are at Powderhorn Mile, if you please. While here I am only an idle, wandering 'sport.' But I am bound to beat Tabor, all the same."

"I consait you'll do it."

"Let's go out now and see the fun."

They went at once, and there was enough to occupy their notice. As Texas Tartar had expected, the arrest of Kendall caused considerable excitement. The young man, though nearly a stranger in town, had been a favorite; his connection with the Westerleys, who were unanimously pronounced the town's leading citizens, gave him outside importance; and then there was the interrupted wedding to lend its peculiar element to the case.

Sheriff troy had regretfully conducted the prisoner to the jail, and every citizen fell to talking about the affair. For some reason all agreed that the Grizzly George matter was only a side issue, and that the principal charge against the prisoner was in connection with the smugglers and the killing of Craver and Wells.

The Point of Pines tragedy had started a new current of feeling. It had always been believed that the smugglers had allies in the village, though who they were was uncertain. In fact, the ordinary citizen had not cared, and sympathy had been secretly with the smugglers, who had not been regarded as men of actual

lawlessness. The Point of Pines murder had changed everything; it was seen that the free-traders were desperadoes, and the sympathy of good citizens had been lost at one stroke.

An uneasy feeling began to prevail. If they had allies in the village, who were they? Were they, too, murderously inclined? Who could be trusted? Who were the honest men? If the smugglers would wantonly commit murder to carry on their trade, were the citizens of Powderhorn Mile safe from them?

These were important questions, and all honest residents began to wish devoutly for the capture of the smugglers, but Texas Tartar and Yank, who listened closely, failed to hear any one express the opinion that Robert Kendall was guilty.

Public sentiment was in his favor. It was generally believed Tabor was sincere, but he was credited with having made a serious error of judgment when he accused Kendall.

This was the drift of what Texas Tartar and Yank heard by careful listening, and they were obliged to confess that it was of no value.

The conversation of the two men had already given a clew to their errand at Powderhorn Mile. The man who preferred to figure for the time as an idle, careless "sport," and move under the eccentric name of Texas Tartar, had, really, a more orthodox name, and was well known in some localities as an expert detective. His field of operations had always been in the West, and his present character required no effort on his part.

He had journeyed to Powderhorn Mile on purpose to catch the smugglers. From the first he had known that he had Charles Tabor to meet as a rival, but the latter did not imagine that another investigator was on the scene.

Yank Yellowbird had accompanied The Man with Nine Lives simply because they were friends, and scenes of adventure had long been almost a daily part of his stirring life.

There promised to be plenty of excitement at Powderhorn Mile before the smugglers were captured.

While nearly every one else sought the crowds that gathered in the streets, the inmates of the Westerley house were inclined to court seclusion. The arrest of Robert Kendall was keenly felt. Every one declared a belief in his innocence, but the arrest brought the usual shadow of disgrace; and the marriage, twice set, was likely to be twice postponed.

Despite the temporary encouragement gained by her visit to Texas Tartar and Yank, Norma experienced a feeling akin to despair when she had returned home and had time to think clearly. If Grizzly George persisted in his accusation, nobody could foresee the end of Kendall's troubles.

Albia did all that she could to cheer her friend, and they discussed the matter with more logic than women generally use.

They were thus occupied when the female servant made her appearance.

"Miss Norma," she said, "I have been at work in the store-room, and I found something there."

"What was it, Susie?" was the careless reply.

"Something you must have put away and forgotten."

The girl had held her hands behind her, but she now brought them forward and revealed a package. Deftly removing the wrapping-paper she revealed the contents, and a long line of lace fluttered to the floor.

Norma and Albia gazed at it as though it had been a serpent. Both were prompt to recognize the package they had seen David and Edgar examine by the cliff the previous night, and there was only one way to account for its present whereabouts. The brothers had brought it in.

Miss Westerley was agitated, for, when it was remembered that the smugglers were accused of bringing over jewels and laces, there was a mystery about the affair which was annoying, to say the least; but she made an effort to answer calmly.

"Yes," she returned; "I remember it."

"Did you intend to leave it there, miss?"

"Where?"

"In the store-room."

"Just where did you find it?"

"It was crowded into a niche where the roof comes down to a line."

"I thought so. Well, there is no longer any reason why I should leave it there. You can lay it down, Susie," and Norma motioned toward the table with a languid air.

The girl obeyed and went out unsuspectingly, but the moment that the door closed, Miss Westerley's languor vanished. She reached quickly forward and picked up the lace.

"Is it yours?" asked Albia, catching at a faint hope.

"No."

"Did you ever—"

"See it before?" finished Norma, as her companion came to a full stop.

"Yes."

"Did you ever see it, Albia?"

"It looks some like the parcel we saw David and Edgar have last night."

"I would deny it to any one but you, Albia, but it is the same parcel."

"They brought it in, and put it where Susie found it."

"Beyond doubt."

The girls looked gravely at each other. Either would have stoutly denied the possibility that David and Edgar had come by the lace by unlawful means, yet Tabor asserted that just such a cargo had been brought over Rifle Lake, and the girls had themselves seen the strange boat move along the shore.

Albia's troubled expression aroused all of Norma's loyalty.

"They found it somewhere on the lake-shore."

"Of course," cried Albia, eagerly.

"Some one dropped it there."

"Certainly."

"It may have been the smugglers, but, of course, David and Edgar know nothing about it."

"Of course not; and they are probably keeping the matter secret in order to catch the smugglers."

Miss Westerley smiled upon her friend in her kindest, brightest way.

"You have the correct understanding of it, Albia. Now, of course girls are not smuggler-catchers, and when Susie is done with her work, we will return this package to its proper place. We have more important things to think about than this."

"Certainly, Norma."

Both speakers endeavored to assume a careless air, and, really, there seemed no good reason why they should be troubled on this point, but events were shaping for a painful mystery and much sorrow in the future. Tabor had been right when he said that valuable articles had that night been taken across Rifle Lake.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MARKED HANDKERCHIEF.

THE Point of Pines had never been quieter or more peaceful than when Texas Tartar and Yank Yellowbird approached it. The desperadoes, supposing that Tabor had been drowned, had endeavored to efface all trace of their crime by throwing the bodies of Craver and Wells into the lake, but the surviving Government officer had recovered and removed them to the village, during the forenoon.

There was no other human being than themselves visible as Texas Tartar and Yank walked down the point of land.

At their heels moved the dog, Moses, mentioned by the mountaineer. This animal was large strong and shaggy, but he was not a handsome beast. His head was not only large and coarsely formed, but was marked with several scars. Moses was not an amiable-looking dog, and his looks did not belie him. He was naturally of a reserved, misanthropical nature, and he allowed no familiarities from strangers. He stood on his dignity, and expected other creatures, whether they walked on four feet or two, to respect his reserve and let him severely alone. Yet, he was an honest dog, and for several years had followed Yank's fortunes with true fidelity. A word from Nevermiss was grateful to Moses's ears, but there his affection ended.

The rest of mankind he considered his enemies, though he would graciously endure the company of those his master saw fit to make his friends.

Reaching the extreme point of land, Yank easily located the place of the shooting. Bidding his companion stand back he made a short examination, and then announced the result.

"Hyar you kin see whar Tabor an' his men crouched down an' waited fur the smugglers ter come down the lake, an' it won't trouble you ter observe certain dark stains on the pine needles an' leaves. The shootin' took place right hyar."

"And where did the marksmen stand?"

"Do you see the hole in that tree?"

"Yes; a bullet is buried there."

"To be sure. Wal, you'll notice it struck plum'-center in the tree, an' never wavered a hair. That shows that it must 'a' come from about thar."

Nevermiss pointed as he spoke, and then walked to the indicated place.

As he had feared, the pine needles became an obstacle. In nearly every place they formed a soft, springy carpet to the ground, and nothing could interfere more with trailing. The pressure of a human foot had only to be removed and the needles would spring back into place, and no track would be left.

Yank did not expect to find any definite sign there. But he could see where the assassin's boots had disturbed the needles, and he proceeded to trace this indistinct clew backward to a more favorable point.

"I consait we'll git the thread d'reckly," he observed, cheerfully. "It ain't ter be compared ter the egregious fix my ancestor, Moses Yellowbird, got inter when the children o' Israel was lost. Israel was a neighbor o' his'n, an' the children strayed inter the wilderness an' was lost forty days. My ancestor was busy harvestin', but he took his old flint-lock musket an' sot out ter find 'em. He did it, too, though he was mortally pestered by Injuns, muskeeters an' tenderfeet."

While speaking Yank had been following the trail, and he finally reached clearer ground,

where the surface was free from the needles. He paused abruptly.

"Look!" he briefly directed.

Texas Tartar obeyed, and he needed no explanation to discover what the mountaineer meant.

Human footprints showed plainly in the soft soil.

"That's whar the critters trod!" Nevermiss announced.

"Beyond doubt."

"I have knowed just such an item as that ter hang men. Mind, I don't say 'twill now, but we can't tell."

He knelt down and began to look attentively, for each track had a voice plain to his experienced eyes. Suddenly, however, his gaze wandered, and the detective was surprised to see him thrust the further end of his rifle under a bush. A moment later it was withdrawn, and over the barrel hung a new object.

Yank held the trophy toward Texas Tartar.

"Look!" he directed. "Hyar's a clew ter the crime, or I'm badly mistaken. Thingum-jigs like this don't grow nat'rally in the woods—they don't, by hurley!"

"A handkerchief!" exclaimed the Texas detective. "By Jove! we may have a clew here!"

"It's a monstrous little concern," Yank commented.

Tartar contracted his brows.

"It belonged to a lady," he answered.

"You don't say! What lady has been here?"

"Give me the handkerchief."

Yank obeyed, and the younger man began to examine it with a good deal of interest. It was, indeed, very small, and of the best of linen. It was a peculiar thing to find at the Point of Pines, where, perhaps, no woman had ever been.

He turned it over hoping to find some work upon it, nor was he disappointed. A faint line of indelible ink was soon discovered, and a name met his gaze plainly.

"Norma Westerley!"

Yank saw the sudden start which followed the discovery.

"Made a diskivery?" he questioned.

"I have, by my life!"

"Name on't, eh?"

"Look there!"

The speaker thrust the handkerchief into Yank's hand.

"I ain't over-much used ter wrastlin' with sech crooks an' twists as writin' is," said the veteran, "but I may be able to unravel it—Hullo! Land o' Goshen!"

He had found the name, and the quickness with which he read it spoke better for his education than he, himself, had done.

"Norma Westerley!" he added, in genuine surprise. "That beats my time—it does, by hurley!"

"How came her handkerchief here?"

"I reelly can't say."

"Do you suppose she was ever here?"

"No, I don't."

"Nor I."

"Tain't a place a gal would take ter, considerin' the labor ter git hyar. But she might 'a' come by way o' the lake; I forgot that."

"How long has this handkerchief been here?"

"Not over a week, I consait."

"Depend upon it, she has not been here within that time."

"I b'heve ye."

"Then how came the handkerchief here?"

"Don't rush me too hard. I'm a man beset with egregious newrolgy, an' it's a p'int o' the Yellowbird pedigree ter be sure o' their footin'. Ef the young woman ain't been hyar, somebody else dropped her handkerchief instead."

"Who could it have been?"

"Who'd naturally have it?"

"Some near friend."

"Robert Kendall is a near frien'."

"This looks bad, Yank."

The two men looked gravely at each other, but Yank would not be swayed by a single point.

"It looks bad, I allow, but we won't be discouraged easy. Some hard hills are climbed by stickin' in our toerails an' scratchin' like hurley. Now we've offered our services ter ther gal, we don't want ter find Kendall guilty—though I'm afeerd, Texas, that our offer wa'n't more nor six-fifths sincere."

"We have our duty to perform first, but that does not hinder us from helping Miss Westerley all we can. But to business!"

"Jes' so! Wal, this tells ag'in Kendall, at fu'st glance, o' course. Somebody dropped the gal's handkerchief hyar. How'd he come by it? S'pose we say she gave it to him?"

"A sensible deduction. Proceed!"

"She would only give it to a near friend, an' that friend must value it. Would her brothers do that? Not much, they wouldn't! Brothers can't see no romance in their own sister. Twa'n't them. Only one person, I consait, would value sech a trophy, and that is Robert Kendall!"

"And Tabor insinuates that Kendall helped the smugglers—was here, perhaps, wi'b them."

"An' the smugglers balted hyar fur a bit, as they stole up ter shoot the officers. You'll ob-

sarve, ef you look close, whar they shifted the persition o' their feet as they stood an' waited."

"While they waited, this handkerchief was dropped by one of them."

"Looks like it, by hurley!"

"You stated in a vague way that that the handkerchief had not been here over a week. Oblige me by being more precise."

"It's as fresh as a rosebud, an' I allow it ain't b'en 'round these parts more'n a single day. I take it dew, an' lake mist, must fall uncommon heavy here, an' what with that an' blowin' winds, it wouldn't go unsoiled very long."

"I should be a poor detective if I did not see a way to get light on this subject."

"How?"

"I shall skillfully question Miss Westerley. If she really gave this tell-tale article to any person, we want to know who it was."

"An' ef it proves ter be Kendall?"

Texas Tartar shook his head slowly.

"I'm afraid we shall have to withdraw our aid from the young lady. Possibly, however, we can do her no greater favor, if Kendall is guilty, than to convince her of the fact; though I am not sure that she would so regard it. Women are not apt to be grateful when one opens their eyes to the failings of the object of their affections."

"That's because it harrers up their soul, Texas. Don't blame 'em. Women are mighty faithful, an' a blighted affection is wu'ss than the malignant newrolgy—it is, by hurley! But I'll go on with the s'arch, now, an' see what I kin diskiver."

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAKE MYSTERY.

THE arrival of night found Yank and Texas Tartar still on the shore of the lake. The former had followed the trail until he learned all that it would tell, which was not much. He had learned that the slayers of Tabor's companions had come to a point on the shore, one-fourth of a mile above the Point of Pines, in a boat, and had then secreted their craft and stolen down upon the unsuspecting officers.

To this knowledge was to be added the clues afforded the mountaineer's experienced eyes by the footprints, and the evidence of the handkerchief, and then the whole story was told.

After finishing this work the two adventurers sought a favorable point near the lake and lay down to await the fall of the night. They were in no hurry to return to Powderhorn Mile. They had a boat concealed near at hand, and intended to use it after dark.

The ominous report given by the villagers of the state of affairs on the lake after dark had no terrors for them, and they were going out, not with the hope of escaping a meeting with the terrible Horned Fish, but, on the contrary, with the hope of encountering the mystery of the lake.

As the hour drew near they began to feel fresh interest.

"Have you made yer will, Texas?" asked Yank.

"I regret to say that I have neglected that very important step."

"Same hyar, but I dunno as it amounts ter much. I ain't got no treasures but Moses an' my rifle, an' nobody else could handle 'em. Moses would bite the shins off'n the man who tried ter own him outside the Yellowbird fam'ly, no matter how good their pedigree was; while as fur the rifle, it'd be took with an' egregious newrolgy in another man's hands. 'Twould act like the mischief with anybody else foolin' 'round the trigger, the rifle would."

"I expect it to make a good record to-night."

"Ef we see the big fish."

"Exactly."

"What's the size o' the critter, anyhow?"

"According to all accounts it must be six or eight feet long."

"A fine sort o' a fish; good 'eal like the whale which Jonah Yellowbird swallowed. This critter, I b'lieve, sarculates mostly under water."

"Yes."

"With a sword stickin' up out o' his head like a ribosnerros, which will cut a boat in two like it was a aig-shell."

"Just so."

"Texas, I have a mortal hankerin' ter see that fish. It's clear he's a great onnat'ral. Le's git inter our boat an' go out. He may be fairly weepin' ter find a boat ter sharpen his nose on, the fish may; an' it ain't right fur us ter keep him waitin'."

"We will go at once."

They walked down the shore to where the boat had been left. It had not been disturbed, and they prepared to embark. At this point the dog looked at them earnestly, and manifested some concern. He understood their intention to go out, and was afraid that he would be left behind.

"You'll go, Moses, of course," observed his master.

Moses seemed to comprehend perfectly, and he condescended to vibrate his tail in a thankful way.

"We may need help in the grapple with the egregious fish," added Nevermiss, "an' from the way the dog kin tackle an' Injun or a b'ar, I

consait he could thrash a fish like all creation. He's an uncommon dog, is Moses, an' I'd resk him ter flax anything but a ghost. Ever see a ghost, Texas?"

"Never."

"Nor me, though I knowed a man once who did. 'Twas his mother-in-law, the ghost was, an' she come back on a ticket o' leave, or somethin' o' that sort. He was alone when she rived, an' she'd changed so sense her demise that he didn't know her."

"Who in hurley be you? sez he."

"I'm a phantom shade," sez she."

"Ain't Lucretia Borjus, be ye? sez he."

"I'm yer wife's mother," sez she."

"You've improved," sez he."

"I hev come ter say you're a brute ter abuse an' harass my da'rter so," sez she."

"You've said that afore," sez he."

"I say it ag'in," sez she."

"Wal, I want you ter know you can't run this ranch no more," sez he. "I put up with it when you was in the flesh," sez he, "fur you weighed more nor my Durham heifer, but no spook kin bulldoze me in my own house," sez he."

"It was a reckless thing fur him ter say, fur the words was barely out o' his mouth when the ghost picked up a rollin'-pin an' hit him a lick across the head. He caved right away."

"I give up," sez he, shakin' in his boots like the mischief. "You're my mother-in-law, an' you are still boss o' the roost," sez he, piteously."

"Will you 'buse my darter any more?" sez she."

"Never," sez he."

"Whar's the cold vittels," sez she."

"You see her mind still run in the old channel, ef she was a spook, an' when he'd direckted her, she went inter the p'ntry an' 'bout cleaned it out; an' she drinked lots o' ice-water, too. I consait they didn't have much o' these things whar she lived. She come reg'lar arter that, an' a more cowed man than he was you couldn't find. You see, he'd thought his tribulations an' distresses over, but they wa'n't by a good 'eal. That ghost was right on hand, an' at last accounts she was still runnin' the whole outfit."

Texas Tartar had been waiting patiently for the conclusion of this story, and when Yank reached the end, he turned again to the boat.

"Jump in, Texas, an' you, too, Moses. Lay down right thar, dog, an' keep yer eyes open fur abnormal fishes. I'm glad, Texas, thar ain't no whales 'round hyar, or we might git swallowed, an' ef a whale once got me in his kitchen 'stablishment, he'd be jest mean enough ter keep me thar. That'd be onpleasant, though it might sweat the newrolgy out o' me."

The mountaineer pushed the boat away from the bank, and then began to use the oars.

Texas Tartar had seen his veteran friend in a good many roles, and admired him in all, and as an oarsman he was not behind his record. Many a time had Nevermiss used the blades when hostile Indians were all about, seeking his life and, with equal poor luck, seeking him, and such experiences running the gantlet on water had given him wonderful skill.

Now, the oars arose and fell with such remarkable ease, regularity and silence, that the craft might have been thought a phantom-boat.

"Which way?" Yank asked.

"Use your own judgment."

"Tain't worth much now; I ain't no fisherman."

"The Horned Fish is not to be sought like other things. Perhaps it would be as well to circle slowly around the lake. It is all a matter of chance, anyhow."

"I hope we sha'n't be obleeged to ride on the fish's horn," quoth Yank, whose humorous fancy was not to be put down by any circumstance.

"I supposed a Yellowbird could ride anything."

"They draw the line at horned fishes, Texas. Adam Yellowbird got inter trouble with snakes, an' he left a written exhortation ter all o' our fam'ly pedigree never ter mix with varmints we didn't onderstand. Adam was right, too, as become a highly-eddicated man."

Despite this light conversation, the men were in a serious mood. Whatever the Horned Fish was, it was a creature to be feared. Its record was one of destruction. Since its appearance in Rifle Lake boating had been rendered so dangerous at night that even hardy men, like Tim Purcell, would not go out. Boats had been run down, split and sunk by the monster, and several lives had been lost.

Yank and Texas Tartar were not prepared to say just what this monster was, but they knew it was not a myth, and they did not seek it in any scornful mood. They knew they were risking their lives, but they were determined to know more about the mystery if they could.

Nevermiss rowed on in his inimitable way. Almost without noise the boat glided over the water, and both men watched closely. Texas Tartar held his rifle ready for use, and Moses, evidently impressed with the belief that something exciting was ahead, crouched between the other voyagers and watched as sharply as they.

Following the course decided upon, Yank proceeded to make the circuit of the lake. They kept near enough to the shore to see the dark

line of trees distinctly, yet not near enough to make their own boat visible from that point.

In this way considerable time was consumed, but the Horned Fish did not appear.

A change was at hand, however.

Moses had maintained his position and manifested some uneasiness, but his attention had never been long directed toward the same point. Anon, however, Yank noticed that the dog was looking sharply down the lake, with his ears pointed suggestively. Nevermiss had before then had proof that Moses possessed remarkable powers in this line, and all the mountaineer's attention became fixed upon him.

The dog's uneasiness increased. He arose to his feet fully, and a low growl sounded from his throat.

"What is it, Moses?" asked his master.

Moses answered with another growl, and his uneasiness became surprising. He had never shown anything of the kind when working against Indians or wild animals, and the question was natural: Were supernatural things at work?

"Hark!" added the mountaineer; "I hear somethin'!"

There was an audible splashing of water directly ahead, but Texas Tartar looked in vain for the cause. Perhaps Yank's eyes were sharper, but he suddenly exclaimed:

"The Horned Fish, by hurley!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A SKIRMISH ON THE WATER.

TEXAS TARTAR grasped his rifle more closely and strained his eyes to the utmost, nor was he long left in doubt. White lines and patches suddenly became visible in the darkness, the splashing increased, and it became evident that something was forcing its way through the water at great speed.

"Give it a shot when I sound the word, lad!" cried Nevermiss, as he poised the oars and prepared to avoid a collision.

There was time for no further words, for the unknown creature of the lake became visible only a few yards away. Its course was such that no danger was to be apprehended unless it made a deviation, and even Yank could look all he pleased.

In the midst of a white, bubbling area of water they saw an oblong, dark spot like the arched back of a monster fish—and that was all. But this thing was rushing along at great speed, plowing up the water furiously, and keeping a direct course.

A moment more and it was abreast with them, and only a few fathoms away, and Nevermiss again raised his voice.

"Fire, Texas, fire!" he exclaimed.

The detective's rifle leaped to his shoulder. He was an excellent shot, and he had never taken more pains than then. He pulled the trigger; the report followed promptly. There was a sharp ping! and then the mountaineer caught up his own rifle. The speed of the unknown creature had not been checked, and he could not miss the chance of a shot.

He fired, but the Horned Fish kept on its way without the least change in its manner.

Yank dropped his rifle and grasped the oars again. The lake monster was in a new role as a runaway, but he was equal to the emergency. He swung the boat around, and then began pulling in pursuit with all the strength he could command.

Texas Tartar hastened to reload, while Moses pointed his nose toward the Horned Fish and, with parted lips which showed his strong teeth growled again and again. Even he knew they had to contend with no ordinary foe, and he had never been more belligerent.

Nevermiss sent the boat shooting over the water with remarkable speed. If his skill had been surprising before, his execution was even more wonderful now. The boat was heavy, but it cut the water gallantly.

"Be ready fur another shot, Texas!" uttered Yank, disconnectedly.

"I am all ready."

"The varmint don't seem ter be on the fight, ter-night."

"It may yet turn."

"Lead don't seem ter 'fect it."

"I am sure I hit the mark."

"Same hyar, an' I heerd your bullet strike."

"The Horned Fish is no myth."

"Skeercely."

Conversation ceased, for Texas Tartar was devoting all his time to considering how he was to get the better of the creature if another chance was vouchsafed him. He had tried lead and failed, and it was probable that another attempt of the kind would be equally fruitless.

The Horned Fish stood revealed as an object proof against lead, and such a thing was hard to fight.

That was no sign that it intended to turn at bay; it was rushing away at full speed, and Texas Tartar was not long in seeing that it was distancing them.

Remarkable as was their own speed, the Horned Fish was drawing away from them every moment.

The intervening distance grew greater and

greater, and the uselessness of pursuit finally became so evident that the detective turned to his companion.

"You are throwing away your strength, Yank."

The veteran raised his oars.

"I consait you're right, Texas. The critter is whiskin' away like the mischief, an' a leetle more o' this voylent exercise will give me a condemn'd newrolgy, I know. I'll give it up!"

He dropped the oars inside the boat and picked up his empty rifle.

"Yank," said Texas Tartar, dryly, "we've seen the big fish."

"All but the horn."

"That may be a fable, though I am prepared to believe anything regarding the creature."

"What's your opinion o' this fish, anyhow, as fishes go?"

"It beats a rhinoceros for invulnerability."

"I dunno what that last word means, but it must be suthin' pooty bad."

"It means proof against injury or wounds."

"The fish has 'em; he's got 'em bad. It wouldn't s'prise me, neither, ef he's got the jim-jams, fur the way he thrashes 'round is atrocious."

"What do you think of it?"

"It's a mortal queer fish."

"Is it a fish?"

"What else can it be?"

"Did you hear the peculiar sound when my bullet struck?"

"To be sure."

"It seems to me this thing is iron-clad."

"Seems ter be o' the hard-shell persuasion, ter say the least."

"I should like to see it beached."

"Should like it, myself. I was lib'rally 'beeched' myself, when I's a boy, an' nobody could wield the stick ekul to my gran'father, the Revolutionary relict. Ef we had the old gentleman hyar now, ter apply the 'ile o' beech, the Horned Fish would cry out ag'in' the tick-tacks o' war in the wu'st way."

A threatening growl from Moses interrupted again, and they saw him looking with all his former hostility and uneasiness in the direction the Horned Fish had gone. Almost at the same moment the splashing was heard, and out of the darkness came the lake mystery at even greater speed than before.

"Look out, or it'll run us down!" cried the detective.

Yank swept the oars through the water. He, too, saw that the course of the mysterious navigator was directly toward them, and his powerful strokes sent their craft shooting to one side.

This time the Horned Fish did not seem to be on an idle voyage—it changed its course at once and, still heading for the boat, came dashing ahead. Moses, frightened for the first time since Yank had owned him, sent up a lugubrious howl, and the men realized their danger.

Texas Tartar knelt in the boat and took the most careful aim possible at the on-coming monster; he pulled the trigger, and the rifle flashed obediently.

He might as well have held his fire—the advance of the pursuer was not checked in the least.

Yank's rifle lay loaded in the bottom of the boat, but the detective, after once reaching for it, refrained from using it. He had seen the folly of such efforts, and all attention was now on the attempt to escape being run down. Nevermiss was using the oars gallantly, but the Horned Fish gained at every yard and the result seemed determined. That it would crush the boat as it had crushed other boats seemed almost certain.

Would it add to the list of men it had killed?

That Yank remained cool need scarcely be stated; that Texas Tartar did was greatly to his credit. He was trying to learn more of the strange object, but with little success. The oval back arose above the water black and smooth—unless, as the detective thought, the deadly sword was faintly visible near its foremost part.

Yank Yellowbird was pulling gallantly, but he saw that it was impossible either to reach the shore or outstrip the pursuer.

"Be you ready fur a swim?" he demanded, through his set teeth.

"Yes."

"Then hold to yer rifle an' look out!"

The Horned Fish was almost at hand, but by a skillful effort the veteran swung the craft around and tried to escape by what might well be called "dodging."

Unwieldy as the boat was for such a maneuver, it would have succeeded but for one thing. The Horned Fish rushed by without even touching the craft, but the latter was caught by the disturbed water which boiled back from the monster's side and flung over at one resistless motion.

Another instant and Yank, Texas Tartar and the dog were immersed in the water.

The detective regained control of his limbs with a skillful swimmer's ready art, and then Yank's voice sounded close beside him:

"Swim fur shore!—swim fur your life!"

Texas Tartar needed no urging. The friendly

cover of the trees was not far away, and they made for it with strong, rapid strokes. Looking around, they saw that the Horned Fish had turned and was again moving toward them, and this certainly did not lessen their desire to gain the land.

A second rush on the part of the monster might end more tragically.

Forward came the assailant, but just as they drew near the bank they saw that its attention was not on them, but on the upturned boat. There was a crash, and then the Horned Fish passed by.

Yank and Texas Tartar reached land and quickly gained safer footing; then, looking back once more, they saw the object of their trouble dashing away toward the center of the lake. Not a word was spoken until it disappeared, but Yank then broke the silence.

"Texas, I'm slightly o' the opinion we've found the Horned Fish. What d'ye think?"

"We have met the enemy and got beaten."

"Land o' Goshen! I should say so, an' a narrer escape we've had. The critter's last rush smashed our boat ter pieces, but you an' I are safe, an' you will observe Moses is with us. What next?"

"An adjournment seems in order."

"Should say so, an' we've got to tramp back ter the village. We're beat, but we may be heerd from ag'in. Yes, by hurley!"

CHAPTER XVII.

NEW EVIDENCE AGAINST KENDALL.

THE following morning found Robert Kendall still an inmate of the jail, but Captain Grandford and the Westerley Brothers had announced their intention of "moving heaven and earth" to prove his innocence. That they could accomplish such a wonder did not seem likely, but Norma saw how earnest they were and took courage.

There was to be an in formal examination of the accused, but Grandford did not intend to wait for that hour. He was not satisfied with the idea of the arrest having been made on such frail grounds, and purposed seeing Grizzly George at once, to judge if any reliance was to be placed on his charges.

Going to the ex-hunter's home he found another villager acting as attendant.

Grizzly George was in bed, flushed with fever and exceedingly restless. He turned his gaze upon Grandford with abnormally bright eyes, but gave no sign of recognition.

"Well, my good friend, how are you?" asked the captain, bluffly.

"I'm wal enough; how be you?" flippantly replied Hendricks.

"Quite well, thank you. Do you know me?"

"You're Gentleman Jake."

"Who is that?"

"You ought ter know, as much as we've hunted together in Iowa."

"Come down to modern times, George. I am Captain Grandford. Don't you know me?"

"Don't talk nonsense!" George answered, curtly.

"How did you get hurt?"

"Kendall hit me."

"Why did he do it?"

The ex-hunter's face darkened.

"I'd given him warning that I'd be revenged on him fur breaking my Eve's heart."

"Did he do that?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Now you talk nonsense again!" irritably replied the ex-hunter.

"Did you see Kendall when he hit you?"

"No."

"Then how do you know it was he?"

"Didn't I tell you I had threatened him with punishment fur breakin' Eve's heart? David Westerley heerd me."

"Heard you threaten Kendall?"

"Yes."

"When was this?"

"A few minutes before Kendall hit me."

"You must be mistaken—"

"I ain't," answered George, doggedly; and then he continued with increasing irritation and excitement: "Don't you tell me; I know who did it, an' when I git out o' bed, I have an account ter settle with Mister Kendall. I'll show him he can't kill the father as he did the da'rter. Old Grizzly George ain't dead yet, an' the man who has fit Injuns an' grizzlies ain't goin' to cave under to no boy like him. I'll have revenge—revenge!"

The speaker had lashed himself up to a fury, and Captain Grandford understood the look the attendant gave him and rose at once.

"Yes, yes, Temple; I'd better leave, and I'll go at once. It's clear George is wholly out of his mind."

"That's a fact, captain."

"Sheriff Troy was hasty to make an arrest on the word of such a delirious person, especially as George admits that he did not see the assailant at all."

"I hope it'll come out all right," replied Temple, who had the respect for Grandford which is due a town's first citizen.

Leaving the house, the captain went back and found David. To him he repeated George's as-

sertion that he had heard a quarrel between the ex-hunter and Kendall, and asked for particulars. David spoke with reluctance. He confessed that he should have to corroborate George's story to that extent, but gave the best possible account of the affair. He stated that Kendall had denied the charges, and had conducted himself with moderation and dignity.

"How long after that did he remain in your company?" Grandford continued.

David's face clouded.

"Well, the fact is, we separated very soon after."

"Which way did Kendall go?"

"North."

"What! in the direction of George's home?"

"Yes."

"And the course George had just taken?"

"Yes."

"And, very soon after, Hendricks was found beaten and bruised."

"That proves nothing," answered David, warmly. "Don't accuse Robert without cause!"

"My dear boy, this is a strictly private talk, and I shall not tell—"

"Of course you will not, uncle. Pardon me for my hasty words."

"That's all right, David. This is a delicate point, and we must discuss it frankly. As a rule, I believe in rendering unto the law all things known, but if your story was to go abroad it would do great mischief; hence, I am compelled to advise you to withhold it."

"Exactly my idea."

"But here," added Grandford, frowning, "rises Grizzly George's assertion that you overheard the interview. If he had told Troy that, we should have heard of it. We may infer that he did not tell Troy, but if he keeps on babbling, it will soon be common news. Let us hope he will not repeat it. But if he does, and you are questioned, what shall you say?"

"What do you advise?" asked David, with a troubled expression.

"Give me time to think. You don't want to tell a falsehood, yet we ought to avoid having the quarrel made public."

"Uncle, what is your sincere opinion? Is Robert guilty or innocent?"

"Innocent!" answered Grandford, emphatically. "I will not believe otherwise."

David grasped his hand.

"Good! You give me fresh courage."

"We'll stand by the boy to the last, for Norma's chosen husband must be innocent. Guilty! Never! I will not think it. And now, David, let us go the examination."

They went at once. Kendall had already been brought out, and the examination was about to begin, so, when the presiding justice called upon Sheriff Troy to tell his story, Grandford asked permission to question him in the prisoner's interests. He showed considerable skill, and, as Troy was not at all reluctant to tell all that was in Kendall's favor, as well as against him, the fact was soon developed that the arrest had been made on Grizzly George's feverish charges.

The doctor was then called to testify that George was not in his right mind, and it began to look as though there was really no evidence, and that Troy had acted very hastily.

Grandford asked for Kendall's discharge, but the justice told him to wait until he asked the prisoner a few questions.

"Are you guilty or not guilty?" he demanded.

"Not guilty," replied Kendall, firmly.

"Did you know Eve Hendricks?"

"Yes."

"What were your relations with her?"

"We were friends, and nothing more."

"You did not make love to her?"

"Never!"

"Some one is accused of having trifled with her affections, and driven her to suicide. Do you know who it was?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"Did you meet Hendricks last night?"

"Yes."

"And quarrel with him?"

"No. He accused me of having been Eve's lover, but I denied it, and pitied the man too much for his bereavement to bear him ill because of his hasty words. David Westerley was with me, and can testify that I did not threaten or blame Grizzly George."

Grandford had tried to get Kendall's attention and prevent him from talking so freely, but the effort was a failure. David was in the case despite his hopes of keeping out, and the justice, who cared as little for forms as he knew about them, suspended Kendall's examination to question Westerley.

Fortunately David was let off very easily. When questioned he fully corroborated Kendall, and declared that the latter had answered Hendricks temperately, and had shown him no ill-will. Every moment he expected to be asked where Kendall went when they separated, but the inexperienced justice missed the one important point.

He turned from David to the prisoner.

"How soon after this did you leave Mr. Westerley?"

"Probably in about ten minutes."

"Where did you then go?"

"Home."

"At once?"

"Yes."

"How long did you remain there?"

"Until morning."

"You did not go out again during the night?"

"No."

"That will do, Mr. Kendall."

The prisoner sat down, and Captain Grandford rose.

"I think I may now safely ask for the prisoner's discharge," said the ex-soldier.

"There is one more witness. Tim Purcell, tell us your story."

The boatman complied with visible reluctance.

"Yer Honor," said he, "Oi was out a bit last noight but wan, meself. Oi wint home an' wint to bed, but niver a wink o' slape could Oi git, an', finally, up Oi got an' wint out. Habit is strong, they say, an' I wandered down to me boat-house widout much idea where Oi was goin'. All was quiet there, an' Oi wint a bit aside an' laid down on the beach. It was cool an' pleasant there, an' Oi soon got drowsy. The sound ave oars waked me up fully, an' Oi looked an' saw a boat comin' in. Not a fu't did Oi stir, but there Oi lay an' watched until it was brought to a full stop by me own boats. By that toime Oi knew it was wan ave me own crafts, an' Oi wondered who had been bould enough to go out on de lake.

"Oi sthorted forrud, but before I could get there he was walking fast away. Oi was some mad that anny mon should use me boats widout me consint, an' Oi was about to boller at him, whin thinks Oi, 'Ain't dat Robert Kendall?' Oi knowed him to be wan ave de squarest men in town, an' Oi thought ef 'twas him, he was welcome to de boat, but Oi was detarmined to make sure, so Oi follered him.

"Yer Honor, Oi hate to say it, but he wint straight to de house where Robert Kendall lives an' wint in!"

"Did you recognize him?"

Tim brushed his fingers nervously through his hair.

"Oi did."

"Who was it?"

"It was Robert Kendall!"

There was a sensation in court, for it was clear that the justice expected to prove by a reliable witness that Kendall had spoken falsely when he said he was not out.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TEXAS TARTAR LEARNS SOMETHING NEW.

DAVID WESTERLEY, like every one else, had turned his gaze upon Kendall, but there was but little to reward him. For a moment a peculiar expression rested on the prisoner's face—one very hard to define. It was plain that Kendall felt the force of Tim Purcell's statement, though whether it was the reflection of detected guilt no one could determine.

In a moment more he regained full control of his facial expression, and exhibited far more coolness than his friends.

"What have you to say to this, Mr. Kendall?" asked the justice.

"Purcell is mistaken."

"Do you still say you were not out last night?"

"Yes."

"Are you aware that Purcell's reputation for veracity is of the best?"

"Yes, and justly, I believe. He would not willingly do any one wrong, I am sure, but he is mistaken in this matter. Tim, wasn't that a dark night?"

"It was, that," the boatman agreed.

"Did you have a light?"

"No."

"Did the man you followed have one?"

"No."

"Then how can you be positive as to who it was that you followed?"

Honest Tim twisted his hat uneasily in his hands. He was sincerely sorry to testify against Kendall, and wished himself well out of the whole case, but he felt far more positive than he was willing to show.

"Well, it wor your shape in ivery way, an' it looked loike your face," he slowly returned.

"But you did not see the man's face by any light?"

"No."

"Then, while I admit Mr. Purcell's desire to tell the truth and nothing more, I submit that he cannot be sure of what he says. The recognition is not perfect."

"Well said," coincided Captain Grandford.

"If the man was not you, Kendall," continued the justice, "perhaps you will tell us why he entered the house where you live—a house where there are only two men, and one of them weighs two hundred and fifty pounds. It cannot have been your landlord."

"There is nothing to hinder any one from entering the house. The door is not kept locked."

"Why should another party enter there?"

"I can give no particular reason; there might be several."

"I think we will consider Purcell's recognition perfect," the justice dryly added.

Captain Grandford objected. He took the

floor and made an eloquent speech. He declared that there was no evidence against Robert Kendall. The young man had been arrested on the vague charges of a man delirious with brain trouble; and it had not been proved that Robert was out, as Tim Purcell thought. Hence, the speaker called upon the justice to release the accused, alleging that absolutely nothing existed by which they could hold him lawfully.

Replying, the justice very correctly stated that he did not run his court on set forms, and while he did not wish to do injustice to any one, he proposed to have an accused man where he knew where he was. Grizzly George was expected to recover from his injuries, and when he did so, he would be given a chance to explain.

If he then retracted his charge, Kendall would be released—unless there were other charges against him.

Every one understood this significant addition. Officer Tabor was keeping quiet, but it was known that he still believed that Kendall was leagued with the smugglers, and had given the information to the free-traders which resulted in the death of Craver and Wells.

There was no use of fighting the case further at that point, and Grandford and David reluctantly acquiesced in the justice's decision.

Robert Kendall must remain in jail, but they were free to work for him, and work they intended to with all possible zeal.

Among the interested spectators were Texas Tartar and Yank Yellowbird, but they had nothing to say. When all was over they took a homeward course.

"What's your idee?" the mountaineer asked.

"Speaking as a detective, I must say there is more evidence against Kendall than looks good for him."

"Still, Grizzly George ain't in a fit state ter accuse any man."

"No. If events did not corroborate him I should pronounce it decidedly unjust to act upon his charges, but the clash between Kendall and Purcell looks bad. Tim gave his evidence with great reluctance, and if he had not felt positive, he would never have given it at all. Kendall denied that he was out. What was his motive?"

"He may have had an egregious secret ter hide, or he may have did it on gin'ral grounds."

"Whichever it was, he made a bad break. Again, granting that Purcell was right, what was Kendall doing in the boat on the lake?"

"Possibly he was out fur air."

"It is possible, but you can rest assured that Charles Tabor will not forget that it was on the same night that the smugglers landed their contraband goods."

"Looks bad fur Kendall, by hurley!" admitted Nevermiss, with a shake of his head. "Still, Texas, men hev been wrongfully accused afore now."

"We will hope that Kendall will be proved innocent. This reminds me to say that I shall visit Norma Westerley, after dinner, and try to get some light in regard to the handkerchief we found at the Point of Pines."

This arrangement was followed out. The two men went to their quarters and remained quiet until past noon. Shortly after this hour they saw Grandford and the Westerley brothers go past, and the detective was not long in realizing that he would have a clear field at the Westerley house.

He started at once.

When he arrived there he asked to see Norma, and she soon joined him in the room to which the servant had accompanied him. Evidently she had heard all the unfavorable news and was deeply affected. Her face was grave and sad, but she turned her regard upon him with an anxiety which plainly asked if he had brought any good news.

He began by referring to the so-called examination, and assured her that there was no need of worrying over it while the case was based on a fever-stricken man's charges.

Later, they could see what Hendricks would say in his right mind, and act accordingly. Then he came quietly to business.

"Yank Yellowbird and I were over to the Point of Pines, yesterday. By the way, were you ever there?"

"No."

This established the fact that it was not Norma who dropped the handkerchief, but he went on calmly:

"We went over the whole ground, but, of course, there was only a mute sign or two. We found footprints, but they prove neither innocence nor guilt."

"I am sure Robert Kendall was not there."

"The prosecution will yet prove it if they keep on. If he was out in a boat, as Purcell says, he would have barely time enough to go to the Point of Pines and back. If we can show that he did not go, one charge may possibly be disproven at its very beginning."

"I am sure he was not out in the boat!" declared Norma, firmly.

"That is the proper way to look at it."

"Robert is not capable of either crime laid at his door."

"Such is my impression."

"I am impressed with the idea, sir, that you

and Mr. Yellowbird are capable of learning more than any other person here, and I would be glad to have you formally enter my employ, if you will, at a fixed rate of payment, and do all you can to prove Mr. Kendall's innocence."

"Thank you for your confidence, Miss Westerley, but neither Yank nor myself care to do this. We are not in need of money, at present, and not willing to engage ourselves to any one's service. We will, however, continue our investigation, and see what we can learn. By the way, I have found a handkerchief outside the village which has your name upon it. May I ask if it is yours?"

He produced the bit of evidence from the Point of Pines, and Norma became agitated.

"You did not find it near George Hendricks's house?" she asked, uneasily.

"Nowhere near it."

The girl breathed a sigh of relief.

"I am glad to hear it. Yes; the handkerchief is mine."

"May I ask why you thought that I found it near Hendricks's house?"

"I did not think so, but the fear was momentarily suggested by the fact that Mr. Kendall took it from me, in sport, a few days ago."

"Carried it away with him, eh?"

"Yes."

"When was this?"

"To-day is Thursday—it was last Monday. But why are you so particular to know?" she suddenly added, with a show of suspicion.

"The article looked so fresh and neat that I was sure it could not have been on the ground long. For such a remote place as Powderhorn Mile, you use a very fine quality of handkerchief; but then, ladies carry good taste wherever they go."

Texas Tartar had carelessly replaced the handkerchief in his pocket, for it had assumed no small importance. Norma had given it to Kendall on Monday, and it had been found on Wednesday at the Point of Pines, near where the smuggler-assassin stood and talked. He believed it had been accidentally dropped there on Tuesday night, just before the shooting, and its mute evidence was very important. He had tried by rapid talking to divert Norma's attention from the fact that he had again pocketed it, but the artifice was not a success.

She, too, had an interest in the article, and she did not fail to watch it.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DETECTIVE TAKES A FIRM STAND.

MISS WESTERLEY spoke quietly.

"Haven't you forgotten one thing, sir?" she asked.

"What is that?" asked Texas Tartar.

"That the handkerchief is mine, not yours," she replied, with a smile.

"I did not forget, but I would like your permission to keep it."

"Why do you want it?"

"Perhaps Mr. Kendall would like it back."

He assumed a light, playful way, but her face at once became grave.

"There is more to this than I know!" she exclaimed.

"I don't understand."

"It is plain to me that you have an object in keeping the handkerchief not known to me. You produced it here, and brought about a confession from me, for an object which I cannot conceive. What does it mean? Are you deceiving me?"

She had grown agitated, and he saw that her quick penetration had forced him into a dilemma.

"Why should I deceive you?" he asked.

"How can I deceive you?"

"I will tell you one way, and what I suspect," she answered, in a tremulous voice. "You may be a detective, who has purposely sought and gained my confidence, to wring from me admissions which you hope to use against Robert Kendall. Tell me if you have done this?"

Miss Westerley had risen, and she now stood before him pale and agitated, yet with an accusing look and an exhibition of reserved firmness which was suggestive. She had only to make sure that her suspicions were correct, and she would be Texas Tartar's bitter enemy.

He was vexed and chagrined, but kept his composure better than was to be expected.

"In one word, Miss Westerley, you are wrong. I am not your enemy, nor Robert Kendall's, nor do I wish to prove him guilty. On the contrary, I should be very glad to prove his innocence, and I will do it if I can."

"You are a detective!" Norma asserted.

"Why do you think that?"

"I don't know why, but I am sure of it."

"Oblige me by being seated, and I will explain."

She slowly resumed her former position, but still looked at him accusingly and suspiciously.

"I wish to declare one thing most emphatically," Texas Tartar added. "When you believe that I have worked against you, you wrong me. I have made some investigation, but I have always worked with your best interests in view. This I firmly assert!"

"Do you deny that you are a detective?"

"Miss Westerley, I will throw myself upon your mercy, unprofessional as it is. I am a detective, and I came to Powderhorn Mile on business. Chance brought me in contact with you, and I agreed to look for evidence calculated to clear Robert Kendall. I have done this, and have never for a moment meditated double dealing. If I had felt free to do so, I would have told you at the first that I was a detective. I confess it now, and renew my assurance that I am not your enemy, open or secret."

"Yet you are a detective?"

"Yes."

"Should you make unfavorable discoveries, what would be your duty?"

"So far as Grizzly George is concerned, I am under no obligations to the cause of the prosecution. Having agreed to help you, my allegiance goes with my promise."

"How about the smugglers, and Tabor's charge?"

"I am unpledged there, also. Tabor, was sent here to make up the case; I was not."

The detective did not think necessary to add that he had come on the same errand, on his own responsibility.

"Having told so much," continued Norma, who was manifestly gaining confidence, "why not tell me the significance of the handkerchief?"

"I will. You say you gave it to Mr. Kendall on Monday?"

"Yes," Norma admitted after a pause.

"Yesterday," announced the detective, "I found it at the Point of Pines!"

Miss Westerley started in a frightened way.

"Found it where?" she cried.

"At the Point of Pines."

"How came it there?"

"Just what I want to know."

She looked at the detective in a strange, pitiful way.

"It was there the officers were shot."

"Yes."

"Was the handkerchief near—near—"

Her trembling voice died away, and Texas Tartar distinctly replied:

"It was at a spot where the assassins stood and stole up to do the shooting."

Norma's color seemed to utterly desert her face, and for a moment she was on the point of breaking down, but she quickly rallied.

"However it came there, I know Robert did not go to that place."

"With your permission, I will ask him to explain."

"Let me ask him!"

"Pardon me, but if I continue in your service, let me work in my own way."

"At least, give me the handkerchief, and let me destroy it at once."

"Impossible! I regard that bit of linen as one of my strongest items of evidence, and it may yet help to save Mr. Kendall. Let me keep it, and if there is any good to be derived from the case, I'll find it. I did a very unprofessional thing, Miss Westerley, to let you know I was a detective, but I am going to go further. Whatever plans I had when I came to Powderhorn Mile, I abandon them now and devote my energies wholly to your cause. I will regard myself as engaged to clear Robert Kendall if I can, and if I should find the evidence on the wrong side—which, may Providence forbid—I will use my right as a servant engaged by you, and hold my peace."

It was a frank, manly avowal, and it touched Norma deeply. Her eyes filled with sudden, grateful tears, and she quickly extended her hand.

"Thank you—thank you a thousand times!" she exclaimed. "You are noble and kind, and I accept your offer with deep gratitude."

Texas Tartar bowed his head over the fair hand he held, and then abruptly rose.

"Enough for now," he said, briskly. "I have work to do, and I will attend to it at once. You shall hear from me again."

A few more words were said, and then he left the house.

"A fine woman!" he murmured, as he walked rapidly away. "A fine woman, by my life! Somehow, I envy Kendall, and rather regret that her affections are fixed upon a man whose future looks so dark. Possibly I can save him, though. If I do, what will be my reward? He will get his lady-love, and I shall get—her gratitude! How lucky it is that all favors don't go one way!"

He smiled sarcastically and, continuing his way, soon reached the jail. He found the burly guardian of the place on duty, zealous and alert.

"My friend," announced the detective, "I would like to see Robert Kendall."

"Hev you a pass?" asked the jailer.

"No, sir; I don't pass; I shall play my hand."

"Ef your cards are like you they must be trumps."

"I hold the 'joker,'" observed Texas Tartar, placing his hand on the jailer's shoulder.

"Are you sure this hyar ain't a 'trick'?"

"There isn't a 'knave' in the deck, friend,

and I should hate like the 'deuce' to deceive you."

"Ha! ha! pooty good," declared the guardian, in a very friendly manner. "You seem ter be a square chap, an' I reckon I'll let you in, though I ain't sure Troy would approve on't."

"I'm the prisoner's lawyer."

"Go in, then, by all means."

Texas Tartar entered, and found Kendall calmly smoking. He was met by a cold glance, however, but, unmoved by it, he drew a stool close to his "client" and opened conversation composedly.

"Kendall, I am with you in this job. I have been engaged as a detective by a certain party. Can you guess the name?"

"I might," slowly responded the prisoner.

"Call it Miss Westerley, for instance. That guess will be right to the point, for it is correct. She is very anxious to see you cleared, and I am enlisted for the war."

"What is your interest in the case?" asked Robert, with perceptible suspicion.

"That of a hired man."

"I will hear your errand."

"Good! Well, give me a full account of yourself, and tell me what points to work upon, and I will begin work with a will."

"No doubt," dryly commented Kendall.

"Eh?"

"You can return to those who sent you, and say that their scheme will not work. The prosecution has shown great stupidity in persecuting an innocent man while the guilty party is given time to escape, but they were never so stupid as when they sent you here. Do you suppose that if I were guilty—which I am not—I could be decoyed into giving up my secrets thus? Hardly! Go back to your employers, and say that they are as keen as owls in daytime."

"My dear sir," responded Texas Tartar, when this sarcastic retort was ended, "if you'll give me a chance to speak, I will say that you are wholly wrong. I was not sent here by your enemies—"

"You came out of pure philanthropy, no doubt," was the scornful answer.

"No; I come because I am hired by Norma Westerley to help you. Assertion on my part will not be likely to convince you of this fact; but what if the lady calls and tells you as much?"

"In that case I should give her some sage advice."

"What is that?"

"I should advise her to imitate me and refuse to trust a stranger. Why, man, whoever you are, you have been in Powderhorn Mile only a few days. Are we going to trust you? Hardly!"

The prisoner was speaking with a calm, incisive utterance, but his manner was not insolent or offensive. Texas Tartar realized that he had met a firm, clear-headed man of the world who was acquainted with the insincerity of mankind, and the traps they set for each other; but, despite this, the lack of belief annoyed him.

"If I was disposed to be offended, I should point to one flaw in your armor, Mr. Kendall," he returned.

"What is that?"

"Why need an innocent man fear even a stranger?"

"Because the law is not always what it assumes to be; the enemy of the evil-doer and the friend of the innocent. An innocent person, accused of crime and incarcerated, needs to be as wary as the guilty, or his good friend, the law, will crush him under foot."

Texas Tartar deliberately arose.

"Mr. Kendall, I realize that you are a man of mettle, and we could not agree if we talked a whole day. I will not say that I think the less of you, but you may make an error in hedging yourself in from those who would be your friends and aids. Possibly, though, we may save you despite yourself. We will see. Good-day!"

The baffled detective waved his hand and left the room.

CHAPTER XX.

NEW VOLUNTEERS.

SHORTLY after Texas Tartar's departure Susie came to Miss Westerley and reported that other visitors wished to see her.

"They are Jacob and Levi Ilbrahim," she explained.

Norma looked at her in surprise.

"They wish to see me?" she asked.

"Yes, miss."

"Did they state their business?"

"The old man said it was important, but he did not say what."

Norma was in a mood when she would pass nothing by lightly. She was so anxious to see Robert Kendall proved innocent that she caught at trifles, and was eager to turn everything into the one channel of all-absorbing interest.

"I will see them," she said, rising quickly.

Mention has before been made of Jacob Ilbrahim. He kept the village store, and was supposed to be a man with money. Tim Purcell, in conversation with Texas Tartar, the opening

night of our story, referred to Ilbrahim as "a miser, a ch'ate an' a skinflint," and there were others who held about the same opinion.

Whatever else he was, Ilbrahim was an active, shrewd and stirring business man. No one could make more money in the same field than he. Money was his god, apparently, and he served it faithfully. He was called very tricky in business, yet he was also called "an honest man." This paradox could not be made logical, but the nearest approach to it would be to say that, while Mr. Ilbrahim's word was not worth much when the character of his small goods as sold in the store was at stake, he was to be trusted in all other business affairs.

As is the case with all other men, he had his enemies and his friends. One class called him a hypocritical scoundrel; the other asserted that he was a religious man; a good father and husband; a quiet, exemplary citizen; and a man who, unwilling to wrong any one, was only led to exaggeration when selling goods over his counter, by business zeal.

Jacob was a Jew. He had been born in Europe, and had experienced persecution there from one of the "great powers." Fleeing to the United States he had begun life anew, and since his coming to Powderhorn Mile, he had certainly evinced great ability in the accumulation of dollars and cents.

He had one son, whose name was Levi; a young man but little past his majority. Levi was a chip of the old block in more ways than one, but his superior advantages in the way of education had given him better command of the English language and, unfortunately, a flippancy which Jacob, always very much in earnest, would never have thought of affecting.

Miss Westerley's opinion of the Ilbrahams was not flattering, and she might, under ordinary circumstances, have declined to see them, but she did not decline on this occasion.

She went at once to meet them.

The Ilbrahams, father and son, had been intended by Nature to look alike. Both were very dark, with jet-black hair and black eyes, and they were alike the possessors of thin, sharp faces, large noses and rather slight forms; but there the resemblance ended.

Jacob was a fossil; Levi was a peacock.

Jacob dressed in plain, seedy black garments, and without one ornament; Levi wore a light-hued, fashionably-cut suit of English goods. More than that he had a huge cane; a flowing red necktie; an imitation diamond ring; a mustache with upturned ends; and an eye-glass which, usually dangling over his breast, he, most happily, rarely used in any other way.

This was the pair who, as though operated by the same motive power, arose and began to bow with remarkable politeness and servility as Norma entered the room.

"We are shamed to see you, Mees Westerley!" declared Jacob.

"Indeed, we are!" added Levi, with a smirk.

Norma waved her hand coldly toward the chairs they had just vacated.

"Pray resume your seats," she directed. "I am told that you have business."

"That was it, precisely," answered Jacob, smiling widely. "I haf done peesines mit many persons, but never with one more harming."

"That goes without saying, you know," observed Levi, flitting his eye glass deftly between his fingers.

"You don't begiu well, gentlemen," replied Norma, calmly. "I do not like compliments, and as I am quite busy now, will you kindly make known your errand at once?"

"We shall be happy to oblige you; my son, Levi, and I. We are peesines men ourselves, and we will speak out at vonce. We haf coom about Meester Kendall."

"What about him?" she asked.

"My son, Levi, and I think dere may be evidence mit the case."

"Something new?"

"Somet'ings not yet told."

"I shall be glad to hear it."

"It vas too pad about Meester Kendall."

"He is innocent, Mr. Ilbrahim."

"I haf no doubt of it."

"Please tell me what you know about the case."

"It vas my son, Levi," and Jacob waved his hand toward his offspring.

"Happy to oblige you, Miss Westerley," added Levi, with a wave of his hand.

"I am listening," answered Norma, as patiently as possible.

"My son, Levi, vill tell you. He vas a boy that keep vide open his eyes."

Jacob looked with great pride at Levi, and that young man gave the left end of his mustache a still more painful upward turn and evinced a disposition to come to the point.

"I have seen Eve Hendricks walk with a man," he said, tersely, and the man was not Kendall."

"Who was it?" Norma asked, quickly.

"It was a blonde swell, you know, and Rob Kendall is dark."

"When was this?"

"Twice—that is, I saw them together twice, and I saw the blonde going that way another time."

"Didn't you know him?"
 "Sorry to say that I didn't."
 "Then he did not belong here."
 "Not unless he was disguised."
 "That is not probable, for how could any one procure a disguise here?"
 "Capitally put, Miss Westerley; capitally put, by Jawvel!" declared Levi, admiringly.
 "My son, Levi, has eyes," added Jacob, proudly.

"Please give me a full account," urged Norma, who was wavering between hope and doubt.

"With great pleasure," Levi responded. "You see, Miss Westerley, I often go out to walk after the store is closed. Fresh air is a vital necessity to me, for my energies remonstrate against trammels and incarceration incident to protracted business requirements and perplexities innumerable."

Levi delivered himself of this appallingly ponderous array of words with great deliberation, while Jacob's eyes sparkled with fresh pride. Surely, his son Levi was a great man—no one else could use such language.

"When I go out," resumed Abraham, junior, "I leave the village and go among the hills. One evening about a month ago, when wandering near the shore of the lake, I came upon two persons walking. They did not see me, for they were too busy with themselves."

"And they were—"

"Eve Hendricks and the blonde unknown."

"Did they seem well acquainted?"

Young Abraham's eye twinkled.

"Very!" he declared, dryly. "Her hand

was on his shoulder, and his arm around her waist. More than that, their faces were near each other, and they were so wrapped up in each other that they saw nothing else. Only for that, the discovery would have been natural."

"It is safe, then, to assume that the man with Eve was her lover?"

"I should say so."

"And the man was not Mr. Kendall?"

"Not unless Mr. Kendall has the power to turn his hair yellow."

"You saw them distinctly?"

"Yes."

"And are sure he was a blonde?"

"Yes."

Miss Westerley drew a deep breath.

"Then it could not have been Mr. Kendall,

and I believe your story will save him. It is very important."

"My son, Levi, haf wide-open eyes!" affirmed Jacob, wagging his head.

"We must go—to Troy, or some one else, and tell this at once."

"Pardon me, Mees Westerley," answered the senior Abraham, "but I would advise not."

"Why?"

"The broseccution haf their eevidence, and they use it der best they can. Vy we not der same? Law vas a queer t'ing, Mees Westerley, and we haf to use shudgment. Now, eef we tells our peesiness to the broseccution, they go to work and pulls down our case; but eef we wait awhile, get more eevidence on der quiet, and den sphring in on der gourt by surprise at der trail, we save Meester Kendall, sure. We haf to be cunning as a dove and harmless as a serpent. I mean—vell, dot vas not right; but my son, Levi, he could tell you how it vas."

"Don't you try, governor," advised Levi.

"Nobody but a college man can make apt quotations—eh, Miss Westerley? But to business. My governor is right, dear lady, and the way for us to save Rob Kendall is to play a deep game and beat the enemy on their own ground."

This argument, logical as it was, might not have influenced Norma had she not have thought of Texas Tartar. She did think of him, and it occurred to her that his ideas would probably be like those just advanced. In any case, she was willing to wait until she heard from him.

"You say you have seen this man with Eve Hendricks twice?" she asked, after a pause.

"Yes."

"Then there can be no doubt in the case. But who do you suppose he was?"

"That I can't say, now," answered Levi,

"but if you will wait, and keep your own counsel, I will investigate and see what I can learn."

"He will learn all!" asserted Jacob. "My boy, Levi, is shrewd—very shrewd!"

"Don't interfere, governor!" directed the hopeful son.

Norma became possessed of a strong desire to get rid of them and see Texas Tartar, and as the latter was likely to return soon, she proceeded to carry out the first part of her plan. Somehow, she found it impossible to feel very grateful to the Ilbrahams, and every minute gave her fresh proof of their ignorance and ill-breeding. She hoped they had put her in the way of saving Kendall, but that did not require her to admit them to the circle of her friends.

Her purpose to get rid of them increased as she saw Texas Tartar already approaching the house, and she made the attempt at once.

CHAPTER XXI.

YANK MAKES A DISCOVERY.

MISS WESTERLEY was not at a loss for words. With great tact she thanked the Ilbrahams for their information, and stated that she was nearly worn out by loss of sleep and worry. Such being the case, would her kind friends leave her for awhile, but call again the following day?

Her "kind friends" fell into the trap at once, and they tried to rival each other in professions of devotion to the young lady's comfort and wishes. With many a deep bow and smile they made their exit, but were so long in doing it that Norma knew Texas Tartar must have arrived if, indeed, he had been coming to the house.

She was right, and the Ilbrahams' slowness had for once operated against them. Susie had smuggled the detective into another room, and father and son left without suspecting that another caller was around.

Texas Tartar was soon in Norma's presence, however.

"Well?" she questioned, eagerly.

"No news," he answered. "Kendall was too cautious for his own good, though I don't blame him a bit. He told me bluntly, but not offensively, that he would not put faith in me, so I came away as barren of news as I went."

"Wouldn't he say anything about the handkerchief?"

"I did not mention it. When he declared his sentiments, I saw at once that I could easily spoil all. I kept quiet about the handkerchief, and will now leave it to you to learn what became of it. This you can easily do when you visit him."

"But how can you help him, if he will not put trust in you?"

"I shall try to help him despite himself."

Norma sighed deeply.

"I hope you can. By the way," she added,

"I have had visitors."

"The Jew merchant and his son?"

"Yes."

"I saw them."

"You cannot imagine what they told me, but I am eager to let you know."

She then repeated all that they had said in regard to the blonde stranger. With this light of hope in view she was very anxious to know how Texas Tartar would regard the revelation, and she watched his face closely, but it was as unreadable as the Sphinx. Even when she had reached the end, he did not speak.

"What do you think of it?" she asked.

"Why did the Ilbrahams come to you with the story?"

"They said that if Mr. Kendall was to be saved it would be best to work for him secretly, keeping these facts from the officers."

"Are the Ilbrahams particular friends of your family?"

Norma made a gesture of disgust.

"I devoutly hope not. I trust I am not afflicted with false pride, but the Ilbrahams are of a very low walk in life. Even old Jacob's money cannot raise them above that condition, or to real intelligence."

"Then there has been no intimacy?"

"None whatever."

"Was Kendall intimate with them?"

"I don't think he ever spoke with them."

"I am not acquainted with them, myself,"

observed Texas Tartar, slowly, "but my opinion of the men is not of the most favorable kind. I should hardly expect them to figure as guardian angels, or anything of that sort, and I must say it looks queer to me that they brought their story here instead of going to official headquarters. Did they ask for Captain Grandford when they arrived?"

"No; they asked for me."

"They did, eh?"

"Yes."

"Miss Westerley, there is a nigger in the wood-pile, somewhere. Since the Ilbrahams are only casual acquaintances of your family, they would never have come here as they did without a hidden motive. They would certainly have gone to Sheriff Troy."

"But what could be their motive?" asked Norma, whose face had grown very grave.

"Did Levi Abraham ever evince a fancy for you—a lover-like fancy?"

"I have hardly ever spoken to him."

"You hesitate. Now, there are more things visible to an intelligent woman than are revealed by words. Looks sometimes count for a good deal. How has it been with Levi?"

"I have sometimes suspected that he did have a fancy for me—which heaven forbid!"

"We now know why they came," declared the detective, with confidence. "As to their evidence, I presume it is founded on fact, and with your permission I will investigate it fully, but secretly. The blonde unknown must be found!"

Once more Norma's hopes arose, and she and Texas Tartar had a long, earnest conversation. When it was over the detective left the house. On nearing the hotel he saw Yank Yellowbird outside, engaged in cleaning his rifle, while Moses lay near him.

"Preparing for the war-path?" asked the younger man.

"I'm tryin' ter undo the damage done by that egregious Horned Fish. This bit o' iron got a mortal severe dampenin', as you may reckon. Any news?"

"Much and little."

"A joodicious mixtur', by burley! The way you choose yer words often reminds me o' a teacher I went ter school to once. He had a happy way o' gittin' things b'iled down an' sorted out like fall apples. Member very plain how I an' Peltiah Pickens got inter a fight one day. We was brought up afore the teacher, both on us howlin' like p'ison, an' diggin' our knuckles into our eyes."

"This is melancholy," sez the master. "Who begun it?"

"Peltiah did," sez I.

"No, I didn't," sez Peltiah.

"Don't ye contradick me, or I'll thrash ye ag'in," sez I, with a howl o' wrath.

"Yellowbird, you'll compel me ter chestise ye," sez the master.

"No, ye needn't," sez I; "I won't compel ye."

"Think how yer parients would suffer ef I laid this stick over ye," sez he.

"I'm thinkin' how I should suffer," sez I.

"It's fur your moral good," sez the master.

"You ain't paid ter teach me morals," sez I.

"I'm afeerd that would be a hopeless job," sez he.

"You ain't much o' a teacher," sez I.

"None o' yer sass," sez he, raisin' his stick.

"You put up yer stick, an' I'll call it squar'," sez I.

"I've got ter lick one on ye. Which shall it be?"

"Up spoke Peltiah, who was a Sunday-school boy."

"Take me," sez he.

"Yes, take him," sez I.

"Peltiah, I'm proud on ye," sez the master;

"I can't whip sech a manly boy."

"I'll help ye, ef you can't lick him alone," sez I.

"You can't do it," sez Peltiah, gittin' mad ag'in.

"I'll show ye," sez I, an' with that I sailed inter him ag'in, an' the master sailed inter both on us, an' fur 'bout ten minutes we was so mixed up I didn't know which was me, except when I got a rap from somebody. This was pooty often, fur I got trounced like the mischief, but when I finally got away an' run home it was a source of great pleasure ter find a han'ful o' the master's hair twisted inter my fingers, an' I knowed I'd blacked both o' Peltiah's eyes. My dad was goin' ter lick me ag'in, but my gran'father said I reminded him o' the way he f'it at Bunker Hill, an' he prevailed on dad ter let me off, fur fear thrashin' would take the tick-tacks out on me."

Yank put the finishing touches on his rifle and then straightened up.

"I'm at your sarvice," said he. "What comes next?"

"I have no fixed plan."

"Wal, I have, an' ef you'll foller me, I'll show ye what I've diskivered while you've b'en cipherin' around in other localities."

Texas Tartar promptly acquiesced, and Nevermiss led the way from the village, along the south shore of the lake, and still to the east. As they went the detective explained his own experience, and it was duly commented upon, but when all was said the mountaineer was still marching forward. The village had been left a mile behind, and they were in a wild extent of country, but Texas Tartar knew there was method in his conduct.

Yank was not the man to make mistakes.

At last he came to a halt in a place so wild that confusion reigned supreme. It was a ridge, sparsely wooded, and very rocky, with miniature canyons all along the course. Texas Tartar became decidedly curious, but he waited patiently for enlightenment. The mountaineer looked around as though to make sure that no one was watching, and then he stooped and laid hold of a mass of green vines which made a mat under their feet.

Yank lifted, and a section of these creepers was raised neatly, and independently of all the others.

A cavity was revealed below—a fissure in the ledge, narrow and dark.

"Follow me!" Nevermiss directed. "It's only 'bout ten feet down, an' no harm kin come on't, but you'll have ter slide."

He had begun operations while speaking, and now disappeared from view. Texas Tartar followed without hesitation. He slid rapidly down an incline, and then found his feet on solid ground.

Once more Yank's voice sounded, bidding him remain quiet, and the fissure, which had been almost totally dark, was lighted artificially. The detective saw Yank with a lantern, and his expression made the veteran chuckle.

"Sorter surprises ye, I consait."

"It certainly does. Have you turned gold-digger?"

"Land o' Goshen! no; I never took ter that business. I've b'en huntin', an' I've found what I was arter."

"What was that?"

"The smugglers' store-house!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TELL-TALE BLANKET.

TEXAS TARTAR swept a quick glance to the right and left, but found little to reward him.

"Are you in earnest?" he asked.

"To be sure."

"And is *this* the smugglers' store-house?"

"Sartin'."

"Show me the stores."

"Come on!"

Yank held the lantern forward and led the way back through the crevice. They had not far to go, for their rock-bound path soon widened slightly, and a recess the size of a small room was revealed. The mountaineer advanced the light still further, and it aided Texas Tartar to see something more than barren rocks.

The recess was littered with odds and ends of various kinds. Scraps of paper, crumbs of bread, a few old garments and refuse of various kinds were most prominent at the front, but in the rear appeared several parcels, wrapped, in nearly every case, in stout paper.

Nevermiss, however, went forward and took from the lot one package which, at first, showed only a blanket. This he placed on the ground, and unrolled with a few quick motions. The contents were revealed, and Texas Tartar started back in surprise.

"Lace!" he exclaimed.

"Jes' so."

"And you mean to say that this is the store-house of the smugglers?"

"That was the drift o' my remarks."

"Have you seen men around here?"

"Not a man, but, land o' Goshen! do ye want more proof? Who else would keep house in a hole in the rocks, an' hev an egregious lot o' lace kickin' around promisc'us?"

"Don't misunderstand me, mountaineer. I see no chance to deny your version of the case, and have no disposition to do so; but I am very eager to know all that *you* know."

"Easiest thing in the world. Like all o' the Yellowbird pedigree I hev a tongue in my head, an' I kin wobble it egregiously when necessary. Wal, ter be brief, when you was busy, ter-day, it struck me Moses an' I could put in some time ter good advantage hyar. I'd heerd a mortal sight o' guesswork talk 'bout goods bein' landed on the south side of the lake, by smugglers, an' it sorter percolated through my cran'um that ef this was bein' done thar must be some signs left. I mentioned it ter Moses, an' he wagged his tail like the mischief. That settled it; Moses agreed with me, an' we came hyar right off."

"We took the shore o' the lake, an' I finally found whar some boat was landed lately. It was skillfully done, an' them as landed went straightway onto a ledge whar trackin' was out o' the question, but that only stimulated my zeal, as 'twere. I capered 'round the edges, an' pooty soon I got at the trail. Not ter tire ye with skoooperfluities, I follered it right ter this place. The atrocious insex had arranged them vines mortal cute, leaving them still attached ter the roots so they wouldn't die; but the Yellowbird blood was up, an' all the newrolgy in the world couldn't head me off."

"Moses an' I come down in hyar, an' I'll leave it ter you ef we didn't get fairly paid."

"You have done remarkably well, Nevermiss," the detective declared, "and there can be no doubt that you have found all you assert. Have you looked the stock all through?"

"Yes."

"Any clew?"

"Texas, I'll trouble you ter observe the blanket 'round this stuff."

"It is of very fine, expensive material."

"Queerly marked, too."

"Exactly."

"Ef we could see the mate to it, we'd know it right off, quick."

The speakers were looking earnestly at each other, and Texas Tartar felt sure Yank was working to a point of no ordinary importance.

"Proceed, mountaineer!" he directed.

"The color o' the blanket ain't the only mark on't."

"No?"

"Skercely. Texas, jest notice the letterin' awry over in this remote destrick."

The veteran passed over one corner of the blanket, and the younger man looked as directed. On the gray surface there were darker lines, and though not at first readable, they soon resolved themselves into a name.

"Westerley!"

TEXAS TARTAR started in amazement.

"Great heavens!" he ejaculated, "you don't mean to say—"

"You kin read fur yourself," Yank replied placidly.

"But why should a blanket marked 'Westerley' be herc?"

"Bein' a detective, you ought ter cipher it out."

"But I can scarcely believe the evidence of my own eyes, in this case."

"Face the music, Texas; the tick-tacks o' war must prevail."

"We must infer either that this blanket was stolen from the Westerley house, or that an inmate of the house is in league with the smugglers. Can we do the latter?"

"You will b'ar in mind, neighbor, that Charles Tabor told only three men that he was goin' ter lay fur the smugglers at the Point of Pines. Arter the tragedy he vowed that one o' the three was an ally of the smugglers, an' he fixed on ter Kendall because he was the blum-blest o' the lot. The other men were Grandford an' Dave Westerley."

"There are times when we must doubt what seems probable."

"To be sure; an' there is times when sech a thing is foolish ter do, Texas."

"Even if one of the males of the Westerley family was an ally of the free-traders, do you suppose he would be mad enough to bring a marked blanket herc?"

"That argyment ain't so solid as it appears. I consait the markin' o' the article was done by a female, an' the male who took the blanket away hadn't no idee it had been marked."

The detective was silent for a moment.

"Your logic overturns mine," he finally admitted. "You have given a simple, reasonable explanation, and I shall take the negative no longer. It is not worthy my profession that I should doubt good evidence, but I have had great confidence in all the Westerleys."

"Land o' Goshen! it ain't proved yet that they are guilty, an' we should be the last ter decide so, fully, but we don't want ter blind our own eyes. We must tackle all the evidence, but we ain't obleeged ter think the Westerley family has an atrocious insex in it until it's proved, sure."

"You are correct, as usual, Nevermiss. Are there any more tell-tale signs?"

"Not one, as far as I know."

"Have you formed a plan?"

"My idee is ter leave this store-house jest as we found it. Ef we was Tabor we should want ter scoop in all these things—specially the blanket—right off, immedjit; but we ain't Tabor, fur which I duly offer up mutual congraterlations."

"It will be of interest to us to learn if there are really blankets like this at Westerley's. The name might have been put on here with some spiteful motive, though that is not likely."

"How'd it work fur us ter watch here ter-night?"

"A very good idea."

"We can smuggle inter some nook whar nobody kin see us, an' ef the smugglers come, we kin see *them* without trouble."

"Let us do it, by all means."

The detective looked at his watch and added: "Night is drawing near. Wouldn't it be well for us to leave here at once?"

"I consait so, an' we'll go."

The mountaineer refolded the blanket around its contents with such care that the parcel did not show signs of having been tampered with, and then they left the den. When Yank had replaced the vines, Texas Tartar abandoned his temporary idea that the smugglers had been foolish to have a store-house there. The vines made a perfect shield, and a common person could have found the fissure only by stepping on the vines, by chance, and tumbling down.

The free traders, however, had not calculated on Yank Yellowbird's remarkable skill as a trailer.

The sun was already setting, and Nevermiss lost no time in finding a covert. This he did with his usual good judgment, for it was not only a place where they would be well concealed by bushes and rocks, but a very little effort on their part would enable them to watch both the smugglers' "store-house" and the lake. The latter would be more distant, but a boat could not approach the shore unseen.

The adventurers settled down, and Moses took position near his master and lay with his big eyes turned upon Yank's face. The dog's devotion was striking. His usual grinniness indicated a very poor opinion of the rest of mankind, but his master's slightest wish seemed to become evident to Moses as though by supernatural means, and he certainly knew no law but obedience.

Patiently they waited. Neither was very sanguine of success, for it seemed that the recent disturbances would show the smugglers the necessity of keeping away from so dangerous a vicinity, but the watchers were men who had as soon pass the night there as in the house.

Time fled. Daylight passed; night fell; the stars appeared in a clear sky; and several hours rolled back into the ranks of the past.

TEXAS TARTAR had left the watch mostly to Yank, for he knew who was the most fitted for it, and the detective had fallen into a light slumber when he was aroused by a touch on his arm.

"Wake up!" whispered Nevermiss. "Thar is fun ahead!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

TEXAS TARTAR'S RECKLESS STEP.

THE detective quickly aroused, but Yank kept him from making any rash movement.

"Quiet an' easy, lad!" the veteran cautioned. "I consait nobody is nigh us, but it ain't sartin'."

"I hear oars!" Texas Tartar announced.

"To be sure. A boat is comin' toward shore

—you kin see it ef you look sharp. That ain't all, neither; thar is somethin' up. Before I heerd a sign from the navigators, a man come ciberin' around hyar. He moved slow an' looked sharp, an' was as stealthy as a fox. He went as fur as the smugglers' store-house, an' then seemed ter think all was clear. He poked back ter the shore, an' though he went out o' sight behind the rocks, I pooty soon seen a ray o' light shootin' out sev'ral times. The varmint was signalin', an' it wasn't long before I heerd the oars."

"I think you said well when you stated that there was fun ahead."

"Mebbe fightin', too. Now," added the veteran, shaking his index finger at Texas Tartar, "ef you see any sign o' my left foot gettin' skeerd an' runnin' away, jest let me know it. It's a weak sister, my left foot is; an' it may try ter slide away when I ain't lookin'."

TEXAS TARTAR did not reply. The boat had approached so near the shore that it furnished an all-absorbing object of interest, and he watched it closely. The unknown voyagers were moving boldly, but their stroke was skillful and almost noiselessly. It was impossible to distinguish their number at that distance, but four oars were used.

Yank again touched his companion's arm.

"*They* don't seem to be afeerd o' the egregious Horned Fish," the veteran observed, grimly.

The boat touched the shore and came to a halt. Several men were seen to disembark. They moved toward the rocks and disappeared for a time, but the watchers were rewarded for the patience with which they waited. The strangers came in sight again, and moved almost directly toward their ambush.

That there was something more than chance in this seemed certain, and Yank and Texas Tartar were not surprised when the men walked directly to the vine-covered entrance to the fissure. The vines were carefully lifted, and all the men went down.

"It's a mortal pity we ain't got a rig'ment o' artillery, calvary an' infanry hyar," muttered the mountaineer.

"What can we do as it is?"

"Sneak back nigh the boat, an' see ef we can diskiver a face we know."

"I have a better idea."

"What is it?"

"Do you see the single man over yonder?"

"He's their lookout."

"True. Now, what is to hinder me from going away with them as his substitute?"

"That's a bold idee, Texas."

"But nothing new to either you or me, Nevermiss. The fellow does not suspect danger. All we have to do is to creep up to him, overpower him, and, if we find it possible, I will go with the smugglers as his substitute. You can stay behind and take care of him."

"Of course, lad, a man o' your sense knows that it is reskin' life ter go 'mongst them men?"

"Yes."

"They killed two men at the Point of Pines; they won't hesitate ter kill you, ef they detect ye."

"Remember I am The Man with Nine Lives; I don't kill easily. Seriously, Yank, I am determined to make the venture."

He arose as he spoke, and the mountaineer followed his example.

"I won't oppose ye, Texas, but it's a big venture, an' I hope you'll be wise an' prudent. It'd be a most egregious blow ter your fam'ly pedigree ef you got carved up like a Christmas turkey. Don't let 'em stop your gobble. We will have him directly."

The last words referred to the smuggler lookout, and they proceeded to attack him unawares. Yank took charge of the advance, and it was begun with the skill usual to him. Having gained a point near the unsuspecting free-trader, it was arranged that Yank should creep forward alone. He was capable of moving almost as noiselessly as a snake, and the detective did not profess proficiency in that line.

The mountaineer dropped upon his hands and knees, and the experiment was begun. The smuggler stood gazing about idly, keeping his watch in a certain way, but not well enough to see the figure which was creeping nearer him every second.

TEXAS TARTAR was deeply interested, and Moses watched proceedings like a hungry tiger. He was crouched close to the ground, and was evidently prepared to spring forward at a word from his master, as he had often done when hostile Indians were the objects of their enmity.

Yank, however, needed no help. His snake-like progress continued; he took advantage of every bush and rock; he moved his strong limbs as though they were feathers; not a sound betrayed his movements, and he crept close to the sentinel.

The detective almost held his breath as he saw the veteran's tall figure rise from the ground, but the other watcher saw nothing. One moment he looked carelessly toward the lake; the next he was lying on the ground with Yank's knee upon his breast.

TEXAS TARTAR hurried forward, fearful that an alarm would be given, but when he reached the

scene he found Yank menacing the man with a knife.

"Not a word, you atrocious insex!" cautioned the mountaineer. "You see this hyar weepson, don't ye? Wal, it's got a sharp p'int, an' it hurts like the mischief when it's run inter a feller. I know, fur ev'ry man I've killed with it tol' me so d'reckly after. I always kili a man 'fore I go ter bed, as it steadies my narves egregiously."

Had the situation been less grave Texas Tartar would have smiled to hear honest Yank assume the role of a desperado, but, as it was, he added his word to the cause.

"Better kill him at oncel" he sternly observed.

"I will, ef he raises a peep o' any magnitood."

"Mercy! mercy!" gasped the man, completely demoralized with fear.

"I'm afeerd we can't save ye, mister."

"I won't speak a word," protested the prisoner.

"You won't, eh?"

"No."

"Who be you, anyhow?"

"My name is Jed Nixon."

"Who be the rest o' your gang?"

A sudden change passed over the man's face.

"Never mind," he answered.

"I consait I shall have ter use the knife."

"Kill me ef you will, but I won't tell!"

There was that in the smuggler's voice which showed him to be in full earnest, and Nevermiss knew that it would not do to waste time on him then. Possibly no confession could be wrung from him; certainly it could not be obtained without a good deal of trouble.

Neither of the captors possessed a rope, but a substitute was soon found. Texas Tartar had seen that the smuggler resembled him sufficiently to make his daring plan feasible, and as he meant to appropriate his hat and coat, the detective's own coat was promptly offered for sacrifice. Yank quickly cut it into strips, and the prisoner's hands were bound.

When he had been gagged they were ready for the next step.

They had been none too soon. While Yank was stowing the smuggler away in a niche, Texas Tartar had been putting on his newly-acquired garments, and an uneasy whine from Moses drew their attention to another quarter.

The other strangers had come up from the store-house.

"Be you still detarmined ter go, Texas?" asked the mountaineer, with perceptible anxiety.

"Yes. Stay around here for awhile after I am gone; then, if nothing happens, return to Powderhorn Mile and await my return. Don't be troubled about me, Yank; remember I am The Man with Nine Lives. Down, old friend; down, or you'll be seen!"

Nevermiss sunk to the ground and the smugglers approached.

"Come on, Nixon!" directed one.

Promptly the detective obeyed. With a light, farewell gesture to Yank, he walked forward and joined the strangers.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BURIED SECRET.

NEVERMISS watched his friend with great anxiety, for he was sure that Texas Tartar was risking his life with the chances vastly against him. Many a time the mountaineer had taken similar risks, and he could have done it then with inimitable nonchalance; but it was quite a different matter to see his ally take the risk.

No particular attention was given to the fictitious smuggler. He took place near the rear of the party and walked boldly along. The errand of the men was made clear by the packages they carried; they had removed a portion of the goods from the store-house.

Yank moved further forward. He held his rifle ready for use, and did not intend to see his friend fight any possible battle alone, but no battle occurred—not then.

Reaching the water the smugglers embarked, and the mountaineer saw Texas Tartar secure a place at one side. Evidently he wished to be where he would have a faint hope of escape, in case he was detected.

The oars touched water and the boat moved away from shore. The former care was noticeable in the wickling of the blades, and scarcely any sound betrayed their progress as they receded from shore. More and more indistinct the craft became to the watching veteran, and then it wholly disappeared in the darkness.

Yank shook his head gravely.

"I hope no harm won't come ter the boy, but he's off on a resky cruise. It's a good 'eal like what my uncle, Noah Yellowbird, experienced durin' his trip in the Ark. Noah was egregious afeerd o' the snakes he had on board, but he'd contracted ter d'liver them, an' he was too careful o' the fam'ly pedigree ter break his word. Kin you see Texas now, Moses?"

The dog growled slightly.

"Don't a'prove on't, do ye, dog? Wal, you're right—you be, by hurley! The more I think on't, the more I wish I had gone in his place. Wish I could see inter the dark."

Nevermiss held his hand over his eyes and peered sharply after the boat.

"Tain't no use; the dark is too much fur me. It always was too much for me. 'Member how I used ter dread it when I's a boy, an' hate ter go out arter nightfall. My gran'father—he was a Revolutionary relict, Moses—used ter argy ag'in' me."

"Be you afeerd?" sez he.

"Looks condemn'dly like it," sez I.

"The dark won't ketch you," sez he.

"It won't git a chance," sez I.

"You're a weak sister fur a soldier's grandson," sez he, scornful.

"I didn't run in the war-times," sez I.

"Who did?" sez he, sudden-like.

"You ought ter know," sez I.

"Do ye mean I did?" sez he.

"Never said nothin' o' the sort," sez I.

"You insinuated it," sez he, in a voice like a mad buffler. "Ef you think I can't fight," sez he, "an' hold up my end with the young generation, I'll give ye a specimen," sez he, fairly dancin' with turbulent an' voylent wrath.

"He did, too; he took down the beach stick which was kep' on purpose ter doctor my blood, an' the way he sailed inter me was mortal on-pleasant. When he got through I felt tenderer toward him than I did afore, an' I couldn't enjoy settin' down fur sev'ral days. Fack is, he licked me like hurley!"

Still looking out on the lake, Yank confided this story of early experience to Moses and the surrounding air, but the dog seemed to think himself specially called upon to reply. His nose was thrust against his master's hand, and he pushed away diligently. Perhaps he wished to say that he did not approve of chastisement—there was certainly much sympathy and good will in his manifestation.

Yank passed one arm around his shaggy friend's neck, but continued to look after the boat. Every moment that Texas Tartar was in such company he was in great peril, and Yank was afraid that something was destined to occur which he ought to see, but was painfully anxious to have avoided.

His vague suspicions proved all too well founded.

As he looked there was a sudden flash of light, far down the lake; a flash gone almost as soon as it was seen; and then came the faint report of a revolver. Yank leaped to his feet.

"What's that?" he cried.

Moses growled ominously.

"A shot on the lake!" added Nevermiss, hurriedly, "an' from jest about whar the boat must be. By hurley! I'm afeerd—"

He paused and ran forward a few steps, only to pause again, and in every way exhibited a degree of dismay, uncertainty and irresolution very strange to see in cool Yank Yellowbird. If he had possessed a boat he would have acted without hesitation, but he was practically helpless.

"They've found him out!" he added. "The night was too light fur his game ter work—they've found him out an' shot him. Moses, come on!—we'll go up the shore!"

He started at what seemed reckless speed and ran toward the east, leaping over rocks and logs, but, great as was his speed, he made no missteps. On the contrary he showed agility a boy of twenty years might have envied, and a security of foot worthy of an Alpine hunter.

Moses kept by his side, glad of the chance to have active service, and they soon reached the point where the shore curved around to the north. Beyond that point was a narrow beach nearly all the way, and when once the mountaineer's feet touched the hard sand he went speeding along with strong, light steps.

What good he could do was a problem, and, indeed, he really expected nothing to come of it, but he was painfully anxious to get near the place of shooting and discover if the smuggler boat was still visible.

As he neared that vicinity he slackened his speed somewhat and began to use his eyes more carefully, but not a craft of any kind could he see anywhere on the surface of the lake.

A sudden, warning growl from the dog directed his attention to the shore, and he was surprised to see a man on the beach. One glance was enough to tell that it was not Texas Tartar, for the man was shorter and stouter, but the mountaineer did not pause.

He had gone quite close when the other night-wanderer's voice arose hoarsely:

"Avast dhere, shipmate. Oi'll trouble ye to ka'pe your distance until Oi foind out who ye are."

"Tim Purcell, is that you?" demanded Yank.

"It's that same, an' Oi reckon Oi know you, too. Phat de blazes be yez doin' here, Misther Yellowbird?"

Nevermiss ignored the question. He had reached Purcell's side, and had questions of his own to ask.

"How long hev you be'n hyar, man?"

"Half an hour, maybe. You see, Oi came out—"

"Did you see another boat?"

"Yis, an' Oi did. You see—"

"Did you hear a shot fired?"

"Yis, an' that is phat troubles me—"

"Who was shot?"

"Begorra, but I don't know. Dhey shot him an' flung him overboard—"

"Whar?"

"Phere, is it? Out some t'ree hoondred foot from shore."

"How deep is the water thar?"

"Da'pe enoof to drown dhe loikes ave us—a good fifty foot."

Yank let the breech of his rifle fall heavily to the ground. If Texas Tartar had been thrown into the water there, enough time had elapsed to deprive him of any spark of life the bullet might have left. Nevermiss became calm and deliberate.

"Tell me all about it, neighbor," he requested.

"Oi will, dhat same. You see, me thrade has about been kilt by dhe Horned Fish, for no young couples will go out any more at noight, an' Oi detarmined to kill dhe spalpa'ne ave a fish wid me own hands; so out Oi come to night, but Oi cros't dhe lake widout anny soight at the murderous blackguard."

"It was whin Oi had r'ached dhis shore, an' was sthandin' at me 'aise, dhat Oi seen the soight I spa'ke of, an' dhis was phat Oi seen:

"A big boat wid several men inter it came up dhe lake, but whin nearly opposite this point dhere was some sort ave a row in dhe craft. Oi heerd angry voices, though niver a worrud could I make out, an' thin came dhe raport ave the revolver. Oi think dhe first shot was instantly fatal, for pritty socn Oi heerd a voice say, 'T'row him overboard!' an' thin Oi seen some wan chucked into dhe wather. He must have sunk at wanst, for roight after it the boat wint on, an' it soon disappeared in dhe noight."

"Tim, take me out in yer boat!" directed the mountaineer, steadily.

"Home, do you m'ane?"

"Ter dive fur that man."

"Howly Pater! would ye doive in forty foot ave wotter, mon?"

"Don't stop ter argy," was the impatient reply. "Le's go at once, ef we're goin'."

"Oi'm wid you, begorra."

Tim spoke heartily and at once moved toward the boat. They entered and he rowed to the place where he believed the man had been consigned to his grave. Yank was not more sanguine than Tim of securing the body, but he could not rest without making a trial.

He was reproaching him bitterly, and most unjustly, for having allowed Texas Tartar to run the risk, but it was too late to change the detective's destiny. He had gone on his venture, and appearances indicated that he had lost his life while thus engaged.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE NET TIGHTENS.

IT was eleven o'clock in the forenoon of the subsequent day, and Norma, Albia, David and Edgar were sitting in the parlor of their home. Captain Grandford entered.

"Is there any news?" asked Norma, anxiously.

"There is, decidedly," replied the ex-soldier, deliberately, as he took a seat.

"Concerning Robert?"

"No; it is the smugglers, this time."

"Has a capture been made?" inquired David, quickly.

"Not of men, but Yank Yellowbird has brought in several articles which he found in a sort of cache, or something of the kind, in the hills. He and Texas Tartar had quite an adventure, and there is every reason to believe that it was fatal to the latter. Yank thinks he was shot by the smugglers."

This announcement created immediate excitement, and upon Norma the news fell with painful effect. She had placed great reliance upon Texas Tartar. She had realized, in a measure, what was possible to one of his cool, far-seeing, sagacious nature, and had looked to him as the only hope left to Robert Kerdall. Now the blow fell heavily, and though she made an effort to speak, no words passed her pale lips.

"How in the world did it happen?" asked David, in a voice that seemed strangely sharp.

"The mountaineer states that he and Texas Tartar found a sort of store-house among the rocks, which, at first sight, they knew was that of the free-traders, and they lay in wait for those men. They saw them, and Texas managed to smuggle himself into the boat-load of outlaws, but he was discovered, shot, and flung in the lake."

"By heavens! this is getting serious!" exclaimed David, with frowning emphasis.

"I should say so."

"Three men shot in a week."

"Texas Tartar had no business to run such a risk," added Edgar, severely.

"He was too daring," Grandford admitted.

"He paid the penalty of interference."

"Surely, Edgar, you don't take the smugglers' part?"

The young man's face flushed.

"Of course not, uncle, but I hate to see an honest man throw away his life in a useless hazard."

"What articles did Yel'owbird bring in?" inquired David, after a pause.

"A few trifles, and a package of lace."

Grandford made the statement carelessly, but it seemed to exercise a strange effect upon all his hearers. Norma and Albia exchanged a quick, significant glance, and then the former looked toward her brothers. They were gazing at each other, and appeared to be perturbed.

Verily, the word "lace" was a firebrand in that house.

"Where did he get the lace?" asked David, at last.

"Out of the smugglers' store-house."

"Were there other valuables?"

"I think not. There was not much in the store-house, anyway, and the smugglers took away nearly all in their boat."

"It seems strange to me that these outlaws cannot be captured," cried Edgar, with zeal.

"Perhaps they will be now."

"Any fresh measures afoot?"

"Nothing especial, but a vigorous search will be made. Yank Yellowbird is reticent, but nearly every one else is of the opinion that the smugglers have allies right here in Powderhorn Mile, and a close search will be made."

David and Edgar exchanged glances.

"Here is a chance for us, Ed," said the older brother.

"Yes. Who knows but we may get the clew and run these fellows down?"

David laughed.

"I think our show is as good as anybody's, and we will consider it more seriously anon. Is there more news, uncle?"

"No."

"Then I'll excuse myself, and see you all at a future time."

He left the room, while Norma questioned Grandford further. She had been deeply shocked by the news about Texas Tartar. The fact that he had agreed to help her had done much to keep up her flagging spirits, for she realized that he was a man to secure victory if one was to be gained, but Robert Kendall's chances seemed to have grown much more dubious.

The captain told all he knew, but that was not much, and it did not serve to encourage Norma. The latter found herself growing nervous, and as she felt almost incapable of keeping still, she finally decided to go out and see Yank Yellowbird.

Accompanied by Albia she went up-stairs, but once in her room she excused herself to her friend and went out. She had not forgotten what Grandford had said about the lace brought in by Nevermiss, and it had vividly recalled the other lace of which she knew.

This particular package had been restored to the niche in the store-room after Susie had completed her work, and Norma had seen it no longer ago than the morning of that day. Some mysterious power now seemed to draw her toward the lace, and she obeyed the inclination.

Reaching the store-room she passed along among the barrels and boxes and soon gained the desired point, but when she raised her eyes a new experience awaited her.

The package was gone!

Unconsciously the girl pressed one hand over her fast-throbbing heart. Her mind was all too active, and the various scenes of the drama went flitting, kaleidoscope-like, before her.

First, there was the night-scene in the hills when she saw David and Edgar have and examine a package of lace.

Secondly, there was the discovery of lace inside the Westerley house.

Thirdly, there was Grandford's recent revelation, and the fact that lace had been found in the smugglers' den. She remembered how David and Edgar had looked at each other, and the remark of the latter which almost indicated sympathy for the free-traders. Now, the lace, which had so recently been in the niche, was gone, and Norma did not fail to remember that David had left the room a little before her.

The natural inference was that, alarmed by the news of Yank's discovery, young Westerley had hastened to secure—or, perhaps, to destroy—the tell-tale evidence in the store-room.

A light step sounded behind Norma.

She turned and saw Albia.

One glance the girls exchanged, and then they knew that the same impulse had brought both there. Norma took her companion's arm.

"Come!" said she; "let us go back."

They went to the sleeping-room, but not another word passed between them on the subject nearest their minds. They would have denied with energy any assertion that David or Edgar could be guilty of a crime or a misdemeanor, but their hearts were heavy. There was a mystery about it all which they could in no way explain.

Norma made her preparations at once to go out. She did not know where to find Yank Yellowbird, but chance favored her; she had not gone far from the house when she saw the mountaineer and his dog. A motion from her was enough to stop the veteran, and she soon joined him.

His grave expression at once attracted her attention.

"I wanted to see you," she began, abruptly.

"I have heard—"

"What happened last night?"

"Yes."

Yank shook his head soberly.

"I'm afeerd Texas Tartar has come ter grief."

"What was in the smugglers' den?"

Without outward evidence that he considered as peculiar her disregard of the subject he had introduced, Yank gave the list in a deliberate way.

"And the lace? What was it like?" she asked.

"I give most on't to Sheriff Troy, but kep' this small artom as a sample."

He fished in a huge pocket in his coat, and brought out the "sample." His big fingers handled it awkwardly, but not so with Norma. She placed it in a favorable position, and a single look was enough to settle one point.

The lace was exactly like that lately in the store-room of her own house.

She was agitated, though she tried to hide the fact, and she was not reassured when she looked up and saw Yank's gaze bent keenly upon her. Almost instantly, however, a good-humored smile appeared on his face.

"Egregious funny how folks will run ter sech trifles, ain't it?" he asked. "I never had many sech vanities. I've beerd my marin say my clothes was mortal skeerce the fu'st time she met me—though I don't rec'lect much about it, myself—an' I know I always went ter school in blue-drillin' trowsers an' a caliker jumper. They give free play ter my muskels, an' it was amazin' how I growed. Ef my cuticle hadn't stretched like the mischief I'd 'a' growed out o' my skin, as wal as my jackets."

"Do you really think Texas Tartar is dead?" inquired Norma, with another abrupt change of subject.

"I wish I could say I don't."

"Some one else may have been shot."

"Ye-es, but why should somebody else be shot?"

"I am very sorry," said the girl, sighing. "I liked him, and had great confidence in his ability to help Mr. Kendall."

"He'd done it, too, Texas would. By the way, hev you asked Kendall 'bout the han'kercher?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He lost it the day before we were to be married. He does not know when or where, but it disappeared during the day. I was cautious, as you directed, and did not let him know it had been found. Don't you think this clears him?"

She looked at the mountaineer in a pitiful way that touched him deeply. In his opinion it increased, rather than diminished, the doubts concerning Robert Kendall, but he would not tell her so. He removed his old fur cap and ran his fingers slowly through his hair.

"Wal, it may be so," he dubiously replied.

"If he lost it one day, he could not have dropped it at the Point of Pines the next evening."

"I should say that was a fack."

"Some of the smugglers found it."

"'Twould be jest like the atrocious insex. A man who would break laws by smugglin' would jest as soon turn thief."

"I see you are not sanguine," sadly added the girl.

"Who? Me? Land o' Goshen! I ain't givin' up the battle. Not a tall. Not much, I ain't! Rob Kendall is my client, an' I consait I'll pull him through ef sech a thing is possible. Mind you," and the veteran leveled his index finger at Norma, "thar ain't an artom o' direck evidence yit, an' while thar ain't, we don't purpose ter admit no p'int. A man with as pooty a sweetheart as Kendall has got deserves ter be pulled through all right, an' we mean ter do so by Rob. We do, by hurley!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN IMPORTANT WINDFALL.

YANK and Norma remained in conversation for some time, and the latter gradually grew more cheerful. Yank was not a detective, like Texas Tartar, but he was a shrewd, experienced borderman who was said to be a tower of strength, and not only must she put reliance upon him now, but she had faith to believe that there was good cause to do it.

His ability as a trailer might prove more valuable than any detective's art.

Nevermiss had one more object to gain before they parted, and he saw the opportunity when Norma again spoke of paying him well for his aid.

"Money I ain't much use for," he answered. "Bout all the use I ever found for it was ter buy cures fur newrolgy. I've tried an egregious lot o' them. Most all was what I call good, fur they didn't hurt me any; but as fur as gittin' red o' the newrolgy was consarned, I might as wal bought buff'ler meat an' fed it ter Moses. The atrocious newrolgy is hitched outer me ter stay, an' all the money afloat can't decoy it out. Money I hev no use for, but thar is one article would come in handy."

"What is that?"

"A blanket. A good, warm, cosey, comfor'able blanket, soft enough not ter bruise my skins when I accidentally bit 'em ag'in' it."

"You shall have just such a blanket, my kind

friend. We have more than we need at the house, and I will send you one immediately."

"I'm much obleeged, by hurley! I'll be at the hotel an' receive it whenever you pass it along."

"You shall not wait an hour."

Norma extended her hand and bade him goodbye with a frankness which touched him anew, and as he watched her walk lightly away, he shook his head soberly.

"Yank Yellowbird, I ain't sure but you're degeneratin'. You've talked fair an' nice ter that artom o' feminine sweetness, an' all the while you was layin' a trap fur her unwary feet—an' condemn'd pooty little feet they be, too! Look out, you venerable old tramper, that you don't put no stain on the Yellowbird pedigree. Wal, thar's one comfort, ef you do find her male frien's is guilty, she's your client an' you're bound ter keep all her secrets. No word o' mine shall ever harm 'em, an' ef my gran'-father was alive I know he'd approve o' my tick-tacks."

This idea appeared to afford the mountaineer considerable consolation, and as he walked toward the hotel he talked genially to Moses, and told a story as gravely as though the dog could understand it perfectly.

Arriving at the hotel, he went at once to his room; but less than half an hour had passed when the landlord appeared, bearing a god-sized package.

"This is for you," he announced.

"Jes' so," was the matter-of-fact response. "I consait my sweetheart has writ. She's named Temperance Ann Jinks, an' she lives at Grasshopper Crick. When she writes letters she never spares ink, an' she generally sends 'em by the distress company. Much obleeged; I'll read it when I'm through smokin'."

The landlord went out, but the door had barely closed before the mountaineer's pipe was put aside, and he hastened to open the package.

As he had expected, it was the gift from Norma; but it did not create a feeling so agreeable as that usually aroused by a present from a young lady.

The promised blanket lay before him, and it needed only a casual glance to show that it was an exact mate to the one found in the smugglers' store-house.

Yank's face grew more sober, but he turned to the corners for the last clew. There, traced in the same letters he had seen on the other blanket, was the name that had first aroused suspicion—"Westerley."

Nevermiss went back to his seat and took up his pipe. He was troubled, and tobacco always had a soothing effect upon him at such times.

"It's a nat'ral faculty the Yellowbirds have, ter fight their pooties licks when the battle looks goin' all ag'in' 'em," he observed; "but I must say thar is an artom more o' this than my appetite craves. Too much of a good thing is egregious prone ter upset things in gin'ral, an' it looks like a mortal onhealty upheaval byar. Mebbe 'twas all chance, but I'm dub'us. Was it by chance that han'kercher got ter the Point o' Pines? Was it by chance the blanket got ter the smugglers' den? Was the first lost by Kendall an' found by some stranger who dropped it at the Point? Was the blanket stole from Westerley's house? I hope so—yes, by hurley! I hope so—but it looks mortal queer!"

At that moment he caught sight of a paper which was pinned to the blanket, and had previously escaped his notice. He arose, unpinned it and found a few words written on it. They were as follows:

"To my friend, Yank Yellowbird, with the kind regards of
NORMA WESTERLEY."

The mountaineer gravely folded the note.

"Sounds jest like her. Worded as pooty as you please, an' full o' grace an' style. I couldn't never express myself in sech style, but thar is one thing I kin do—fight like all posset. An' I'll do it, too, fur the little woman's sake!"

He arose resolutely. Inaction was not a proper thing for a man with so much upon his hands, and during the afternoon he intended to make a circuit of Rifle Lake and see if there was any sign of the smugglers.

Every time he thought of Texas Tartar the latter's parting words came to his mind—"Remember I am The Man with Nine Lives!" There was not much consolation in the recollection, but the words haunted him, and he could not avoid being influenced by them.

He had dinner at once, and then left the village with Moses for his only companion.

Walking rapidly he reached the smugglers' store-house in due time. The place was silent and deserted, and there was no sign that any one had been there since he left the previous night. Passing on, he proceeded to make the circuit of the lake.

This was no small undertaking, and he kept his strong limbs moving rapidly when opportunity occurred. He was anxious to find where the smugglers had landed, and when the character of the shore required it, he devoted careful attention to this part of his work.

Hour after hour he toiled on, but no dis-

covery rewarded him, and, just as the sun was disappearing behind the western hills, he again neared the village on the west side. He was returning without a clue to Texas Tartar's fate, or to the smugglers, but that did not by any means indicate that no clues existed. Lack of time had compelled him to move rapidly, and if he had had nothing else to demand his attention, he would have set out with perfect confidence that he could run the free-traders to earth.

Reaching a point almost opposite to where Texas Tartar had, presumably, been shot the night before, the mountaineer paused, leaned upon his long rifle and looked thoughtfully across the lake.

"That's one thing I must get Tim Purcell ter do," he thought. "Because I couldn't find the body, ter-day, ain't no sign but it will drift ter shore, an' I must hire the Irishman ter look for it often. He's a good, honest soul, an' a right handy ally ter have."

A fresh gust of wind whirled along the beach, and Yank closed his eyes to protect them from dust. When he reopened them he chanced to look down near his feet, and there lay a white, folded paper. All things were worthy of attention then, and he quickly picked it up.

It proved to be a sheet of note-paper, and, when unfolded, revealed a surface well-covered with writing. Yank read it slowly:

"I write this to say that I am not sure I can meet you Sun lay evening, according to promise. Should I fail to appear, you must not be too much disappointed. It is necessary that I should use great care, for discovery at this moment means great annoyance, to say the least. The young mistress of Westerley house has keen eyes and an active mind, and I am afraid it will not be possible to deceive her much longer. She *must* not suspect us. You lately declared that her influence over me was greater than yours, but you were wholly wrong. She is an estimable girl, but my affections rest only with you.

"Once more let me caution you not to even think of the smugglers. You injured my feelings when you accused me of being in league with them. Eve, excuse me; you did not so accuse me; but it amounted to just that. I know nothing about them; I never spoke to one of their number unless, indeed, the fellows with whom I talked on the beach were of that stripe, as you suspected. I can't say; I met them by chance as they landed in their boat. Now, dismiss this matter from your mind. Once let it go abroad that I am an ally of the smugglers, and I should be ruined; besides, it would put an eternal stop to our marriage. George Hendricks is not the man to look kindly on such a person. There are other reasons.

"Now, I may be at the rendezvous—I will be there if I can—but it may be impossible. I wish I could see you, for I am anxious to convince you that I know nothing about the smugglers. If I do not meet you, please destroy this note at once for the sake of the man who loves only you."

There it ended, minus signature as it had been without beginning; but a harvest by no means small had been cast at Yank's feet.

He held a letter written to Eve Hendricks by her faithless lover, and it revealed a good deal.

The writing was peculiar enough to suggest that it was disguised. Evidently the author was careful to cover up his tracks as far as possible.

The reference to the smugglers, and the general tone of the letter, indicated that Eve had already begun to doubt him, and that "the young mistress of Westerley house" was an unconscious factor in the case; while it was even more clear that Grizzly George's daughter had in some way stumbled upon important secrets in which the free-traders played a part.

The letter gave no real clue to the nature of her discoveries, but they had led her to question her lover, if not to accuse him of connection with them; and the vehement way in which he protested his innocence might well arouse the belief that he had been guilty of all she suspected.

As a whole, the letter could not be taken as proof of Robert Kendall's innocence. If he had been the faithless lover, this letter, with its reference to "the young mistress of Westerley house," and to the smugglers, was such as he might have written.

Yank shook his head as he carefully placed it in his pocket, but he was not done with it.

The gust of wind had deposited it at his feet—where had it picked it up?

The paper was thick and closely folded, and it was clear that it could not have been carried far. If the ex-lovers' rendezvous was near at hand, other evidence might await him.

Nevermiss began the search.

Just below, the shore-line was extremely rough and rocky, and it was from there the letter had come. He went about the search zealously, but a short time sufficed to show that a postponement was necessary for the night.

Darkness was gathering so fast that all objects became indistinct, and he reluctantly decided to defer further work until morning.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NORMA HEARS STARTLING NEWS.

"MEES VESTERLEY, shall I speak mit you von second or two?"

The speaker was Jacob Ilbrahim, and he addressed Norma as she was hurrying home through the twilight. She was nothing if not

faithful, and had again been to visit her accused lover in his prison quarters.

Jacob's sudden appearance startled her for a moment, but his manner had never been more polite and bland—his humble bows threatened to dislocate his neck.

She remembered that help might come to Robert from the Ilbrahams, and she became gracious at once.

"Certainly, Mr. Ilbrahim," she replied.

"My son, Levi, and I t'ink dot we may have somethings inbortant."

"About Mr. Kendall?"

"Vell, you know the Widow Shenkins?"

"Mrs. Jenkins? I know her by sight."

"Shust so. Vell, she gomes into our store to-day, und my son, Levi, talks mit her. At first she says notings of use, but pretty ke-veek she shanges her talk. My son, Levi, t'inks she haf been drinkin' somethings strong."

"Eef I vas a man," say she, "I would soon kevetch dem smoozers."

"How you do it?" say my son, Levi.

"I haf the glue," say she.

"The 'glue,' Mees Vesterley, means a knowledge more den most folks haf."

"A clew; yes, I understand, Mr. Ilbrahim. Pray go on!"

"Vat glue you haf?" say my son, Levi.

"Der lover off Eve Hendricks vas von of dem," say Meesis Shenkins.

"Who vas Eve's lover?" say my son, Levi.

"Ah! ton't you wish you know?" say she. "I may liff in a poor house," say Meesis Shenkins, "but I vas not von fool. Eve and her lover haf been inside my barlor many a time, and eef Eve vas alive she would tell who the smoozers vas, for she would haf no mercy on her lover, now he haf deserted and kill her."

"By dot time, Mees Vesterley, my son, Levi, vas all interest, und he try to learn more, but Meesis Shenkins, she stop talk right away, ke veek. She vas going to leave de store, but oop I goes."

"Meesis Shenkins," say I, "vas you a goot voman to sew mit a needle?"

"I vas der boss," say she.

"Den I tell her I haf sewing that moost be done, und I would hire her eef we agree on terms. I vas too peezy to talk then, I say, but I ask her to coom this eefning at nine o'clock, as we vas glosing der store. She vas glad to get work, and she say she vill come, but, Mees Vesterley, I haf no vork for her. It vas von trap set for her to hellup you."

Then Jacob made a very profound bow.

"How, Mr. Ilbrahim?"

"Meesis Shenkins ees a poor voman mitout money, and my son, Levi, and I t'ink she would do 'most anythings for money. Now, suppose when she call you be hiding in my store vere you can hear all, and I gif her money to tell her story, and you listen to all, but show yourself not at all. Den you know der secret."

The plan was plausible and simple, but Norma felt an immediate shrinking at the idea of entering Ilbrahim's store under such circumstances and at such an hour.

"Are you sure she will come?" she asked.

"Yes, Mees Vesterley."

"She may only have been talking nonsense to you."

"Dot vas true, but ve tell by trying."

One moment more Norma hesitated; then she thought of Robert and her decision was made.

"I will come," she said.

"Very vell, Mees Vesterley."

"Can you arrange so that I shall not be seen?"

"My son, Levi, vill do that. He haf a long head—oh! my, how shrewd, and noble, and good dat boy vas. He should be a toctor or a shudge. Yes, Levi vill arrange, and all vill be retty eef you come at a kevarter to nine."

"I will do it."

The idea was still hovering in Norma's mind that she might be making a mistake, but the decision was reached and she would hesitate no longer. Mr. Ilbrahim seemed to be pleased; he declared that he and his son, Levi, were devoted to Miss Westerley's interests; and then he said a few more words and, bowing profoundly, went his way.

It was nearly dark, and Norma lost no time in getting home. Captain Grandford and Albia were in the parlor, but she desired to think, rather than talk, and she went to her chamber at once.

Her thoughts did not prove pleasant, for, try as she would, she could not get over a shrinking at the idea of business, or other association with the Ilbrahams. Since their coming to Powderhorn Mile they had made a class, small as it was, by themselves; and they had been the objects of both ridicule and suspicion. Norma's prudence remonstrated against her going alone to the store at night.

She had just arrived at this point when Albia appeared. Her affectionate friend had feared that she was ill, and when the facts had been told, it looked nearly as bad to Albia.

That Norma was going on such a journey, and wanted her company, appeared to be double madness.

Albia, however, was by no means a coward,

and she was a devoted friend. Such being the case, she did not keep Norma long in suspense. She decided to go, and said so as bravely as possible.

The appointed time was drawing near, and they made their preparations at once. When they first came to Powderhorn Mile, David had given Norma a revolver, and she now added to Albia's uneasiness by bringing it out. Albia could not have been induced, she believed, to touch it, and its appearance on the scene was another proof that the braver girl regarded the expedition as dangerous.

Nothing happened on the way. They reached Ilbrahim's store, but were not obliged to enter the room where public business was done. Levi had been on the watch, and, making his appearance, he ushered them into the office through a side door. He evidently tried to be very polite and respectful, but nothing could keep down the flippancy and self-conceit which formed such an important part of his nature.

Business was lively in the store, but it soon dragged. The girls had been left alone, and from the office they watched the scene. The Ilbrahams were at their old game, and tried in every case to cheat their customers, but they were prudent enough to talk more quietly than usual.

Norma, however, heard and saw enough to make her more disgusted than ever with her allies.

The last customer finally departed, and close at his heels trod the chief character of the expected drama, Mrs. Jenkins. She was duly welcomed by Jacob, but Ilbrahim, Junior, closed and locked the door to keep out other customers.

Mrs. Jenkins was not a woman to entrance an artist or draw inspired rhymes from a poet. She was middle-aged; she was homely; she was very masculine; she had a hard, reckless appearance; and the color of the rose was on her upturned proboscis.

Jacob was not poetical, and the odor of poor whisky which was borne to his nostrils did not dismay him. He brought out goods and explained what sewing he wanted done, and as Mrs. Jenkins was, apparently, much in earnest, the business went on briskly. Terms of payment were mentioned, but Jacob did not close the contract. He leaned back in his chair and spoke complainingly:

"Eet is very hard to make a lifing here, Widow Shenkins. The gost off getting goots 'way oop here is terrible, and only dot I am economical I should fail very keveek."

"Why don't yer buy o' the smugglers?" demanded Mrs. Jenkins.

"Vere vas their office?" asked Jacob, smiling.

"That's easier asked than told."

"You t'inks dot Eve Hendricks knew apout dem, though?"

"Come, now; don't be bringin' up that played-out subjick."

"I haf mooch curiosity apout it, Widow Shenkins. I would like to know all dot there vas apout dot subject."

"Go ask Sberiff Troy."

"Ah! I know petter as dot. A voman can tell more, and see funder into a t'ing, than all der sheriffs. I am very anxious to find out all apout eet, for I am afraid I get sheated py dose smoozers, an' break oop my peesiness. I gif you von dress off of dose goots, to tell me vat you know."

He had bid high for her aid. The dress was not the only decoy. If Ilbrahim's business was broken up, Mrs. Jenkins could not get the work she desired. The liquor she had taken made her confiding, and she looked at Jacob in a very friendly way. Such, at least, was the conclusion watchful Norma arrived at.

"There's one thing about it," declared Mrs. Jenkins; "it is mustn't go abroad."

"Mine kracions! I should be der last man to dell it aproud!" exclaimed the Jew.

"Eef it'll help you about yer business, I'll tell ye all I know," Mrs. Jenkins promised.

"Dot vas goot. Did Eve Hendricks know apout der smoozers?"

"She found out a good 'eal."

"Was der man she used to meet in your house von of der band?"

"She accused the critter of it."

"Who vas he, Meesis Shenkins?"

"A man too proud an' selfish ter marry Eve, so he threw her over an' went a-courtin' the rich lady o' Westerley House!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS BLONDE MAN.

ILBRAHAM thought he heard a faint cry from the office, and he waited, busying himself with some trifle, until he thought Norma was in condition to listen carefully.

"Vy," he then replied, "who pesides Robert Kendall haf go gourting at Vesterly house?"

"Did I say anybody had?"

"Surely, Meesis Shenkins, you ton't mean dot Robert vas der man, really?"

"I don't know."

"How vas dot?"

"He was always disguised."

"Vot for?"

"So he wouldn't be knowed, o' course. He had a blonde wig an' false beard, an' he put

them on, an' he went on so slow an' careful I never could say just who he was. Eve knowed, though."

"But vy should he go disguised?"

"He didn't want nobody ter know he was courtin' Eve. Whoever he was, he thought he was too good ter marry Grizzly George's daughter. He never intended to; he was only flirtin' with her, an' she found it out fore the end come. She come ter doubt him, an' she talked reproachful ter him; an' she said the young lady o' Westerley house stood between her an' him. I heard her say it."

Norma drew a deep, quivering breath. The testimony thus far was all against Robert Kendall in appearance, and it looked as though the trip would merely give the death-blow to her hopes. Albia pressed her hand in silent sympathy.

"It seems to have been a queer go, Jenkins," observed Levi, airily.

"Ah! the poor girl was foolish," replied the woman, wiping her eyes. "There was never a better girl than Eve, but when a man she got ter love began ter trifle with her feelin's, she was all at sea. She hadn't that idee o' the world she ought ter had."

"Why did they meet at your house, Jenkins?"

"'Twas safer so; at least, fur him. I have an idee they never come thar until he decided ter abandon her. Before, they used ter wander 'long the lake-shore. How she found out he was in league with the smugglers I don't know, nor who they was; but it stirred up a row."

"In vot vay, Meesis Shenkins?"

"She was 'way down on 'em, an' she accused him o' bein' a desperate rascal, fur he was all fair an' open ter most people. I do b'lieve she would 'a' throwed him over after that, anyhow, but it came to an end."

"She must have been clean spooney to commit suicide for him," quoth Levi.

"Did she commit suicide?" asked Mrs. Jenkins.

"Eh?"

"Did she? I say."

"Mine kracious!" exclaimed Jacob, "vat you mean now?"

"I spoke plain."

"Of course she suicided," declared Levi.

"She left von ledder sayin' so," added Jacob.

"I ain't sayin' nothin'," announced the witness, tossing her head.

"Meesis Shenkins?"

"Wal?"

"Eef dot girl did not suicide, vot vas it?"

"There is other ways ter die."

"Come, Jenkins; speak out," requested Levi, less flippantly than usual.

"I can't say what I don't know."

"You suspect something."

"That's true."

"What is it?"

The witness looked all around, as if to make sure no other person heard, and then replied:

"What I think ain't what I know, an' this must be a dead secret, but one thing I will say, gents. Ef I had a lover who hated mean' wanted ter git rid of me; an' I stood in the way o' his marryin' another gal who was rich; an' I had found out he was in cahoots with men hunted by the law; an' we had had a quarrel, I wouldn't give much fur my life ef he took a fancy ter kill me!"

Norma had leaned forward, listening breathlessly, but, though Mrs. Jenkins had plainly stated that she was only advancing a theory, the words fell with cruel force, and the girl sunk back into her chair, almost overwhelmed.

Here was a terrible theory never advanced even by the officers of law.

Jacob Ilbrahan's voice arose reprovingly.

"Nonsense, Meesis Shenkins, nonsense. Der girl lef' a note saying she vas going to gomit suicide, an' dot must have been it."

"I hope so, gents."

"Did they quarrel in your house, Jenkins?" asked Levi.

"They did, that, but I heard no threats."

"If you heard them talk, how does it happen you didn't recognize the cove's voice?"

"I had no good show. He was sly an' secret, an' disguised his voice as well as his face, an' I never spoke with Kendall nor any o' the other big-bugs hyar, anyhow. I don't know them, nor don't want ter. Sometimes I'd think I would go on an' git a clew to who he was, but he paid me wal, an' he had said ter me: 'Ef you try ter pry inter my affairs, I'll not only take my custom from you, but I'll make this region too hot ter hold ye!'"

"Desperate bloke, eh?" quoth Levi.

"The gal bad him cornered."

"Meesis Shenkins," added Jacob, "ve would like to know shust who dot man vas. Haf you no more broof? We vant all the glue we can git."

"I ain't got no more clews. I've tol' you how Eve kep' sayin' the 'young mistress o' Westerley house' was in her way. Mebbe that would apply as wal ter Dave or Ed Westerley, as ter Kendall."

"Mine kracious! no—no, no! der Vesterley poys are not off dot sort."

"I don't pretend ter say."

"If we could find the blonde wig and beard,

we might get a clew," remarked Levi, musingly.

"I know who sold 'em."

"How's that, Jenkins?"

"Amos Nash, the travelin' peddler, was the man—leastways, he told me on one o' his trips, when he was hyar, that he'd got an order for sech things, an' was goin' ter fill it when he went south, an' send the things up here by Express. I reckon he did, too, for it was only a little later that the blonde man an' Eve begun comin' ter my house."

"Who gave the order to Nash?"

"He wouldn't tell—sail he had sworn ter keep it secret. He wouldn't mentioned it, anyhow, only he was pretty well primed with benzine, Amos was. He told that much, an' then he was sharp enough ter keep his mouth closed."

"Where is Nash, now?"

"Whar is last week's thunder-cloud? Nash is a peramblerlatin' tramp, an' he may be in Kansas or Idaho now, or anywhere between. It's probable he may come hyar ag'in sometime, but I don't know when."

Mrs. Jenkins's story was told. She was questioned further, but nothing of importance was developed. Jacob evidently gave it up at last, and he proceeded to close the bargain in regard to the matter of sewing and let her go. She went in a very contented mood, seeming to be greatly pleased by the favorable turn of her fortunes.

The Ilbrahams joined Norma and Albia in the office. It needed only one glance at Miss Westerley's face to show that she was terribly disheartened, but the old man smiled blandly.

"You haf heard all?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Sheer oop, Mees Vesterley!"

"How can I do so on such evidence?"

"Pear in mind dot we have only clues. Vot der Widow Shenkins soospects is not to der point, for she knows nothings, as she confess. Now, we haf der bits off evidence, and ve must work on dem some more."

"Perhaps it would be as well to drop it all. Robert Kendall is innocent, but what we have heard will never aid to prove it. Her story amounts to nothing. There is nothing more deceptive than appearances, and wise persons will never rely upon them."

Norma spoke earnestly, but not with the force of conviction. She was discouraged, and all her efforts were devoted to an attempt to convince the Ilbrahams; to influence them so they would not believe Robert Kendall guilty.

Old Jacob bowed submissively.

"Dot vas very truly said," he returned.

"Dose facts off circumstanzhel evidence vas not facts any petter as fiction. Let us take no notice off dem, but look for sometings more reliable. How about der package sent by Express, mit der vig and false beard in it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Maybe we finds out who got dem, by inquire at der stage-office."

"That is not likely. Express packages are not numerous here, but enough come so that no package can be traced with certainty, I think."

"It veel do no harm to try."

"Certainly not."

"We will leave that to my son, Levi."

"I'll investigate," Levi promised, as he thrust one end of his slender mustache further up in the air.

Norma arose.

"I am very much obliged to you, gentlemen, for your kindness," she said, "and I may decide to act upon the knowledge I have gained. For now, however, my only thought is of getting home. I feel far from well."

"My son, Levi, will accompany you, ladies."

"With great pleasure," Levi agreed, doubling himself up in a profound bow.

"Thank you," Norma answered, "but we will not trouble you. We have come on a secret errand; with your permission, we will have it remain secret and go home alone."

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW ABOUT THE WESTERLEYS?

THE Ilbrahams became suddenly downcast. Jacob glanced doubtfully at his hopeful son, and Levi poked the favorite end of his mustache as fiercely upward as if he held the wheel of a ship and was trying to keep the craft off the rocks. Plainly, there was a hitch in their arrangements.

"You forget dere are lawless men about, Mees Vesterley," urged Ilbraham, senior.

"We are not afraid."

"But der hour ees late."

"We have not far to go."

Norma answered almost peremptorily, and Levi quietly opened the door and remarked:

"It isn't far to go. You will be quite safe, Miss Westerley, though I would have been charmed to escort you. Pray rest as easy as you can, and remember that we are ready, at any time, to do our utmost in your behalf."

Very politely he saw her out, and crestfallen Jacob managed to mutter a few polite words, but when the door was closed, Levi flung his hat into the furthest corner of the room and stamped violently on the floor.

"Perdition!" he cried, angrily. "Fiend seize the luck! Hang the women!"

"My poor soon, Levi, it vas too bad!" groaned Jacob, dolorously.

"Ain't I good enough to go home with her?" demanded the son, dramatically.

"You vas too goot, my poy!"

"It's because she is a woman. Did you ever know one of them to have gratitude? Never! The fellers all said so at college, and Joe Lewis-son used to quoth the poet, Buckley, thus:

"Trust not a woman even when she's dead!"

"You deserved petter, my son, but I hope it vill not last. Mine kracious! vot will ve do eef Mees Vesterley not get petter minded? How about der dress we gave Vidder Shenkins?"

Jacob wrung his hands, and Levi ran his fingers fiercely through his hair.

"Norma shall marry me or pay for that dress!" he declared. "Hear me swear it, oh! ye thunderbolts of Mars! By Jove! governor, the fellers at college would have the laugh on me awfully if they knew of this!"

"We vill be paid for dot dress!" Jacob asserted, still wringing his hands.

Unconscious of the storm raging in the Ilbraham dwelling, Norma and Albia hurried homeward. They had hoped not to see any one during the journey, but it was not so to be. They were passing a long, rude shanty, which had been used for a carpenter's shop, when a man suddenly rushed out and stopped their way. His abrupt appearance startled them for a moment, but they grew calmer as they recognized Tabor, the Government officer.

He, however, seemed to be anything but calm.

"Did you meet any one back there?" he asked, abruptly.

Norma had no trouble in making reply.

"No, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Certandy."

"No men, whatever?"

"Not a person, male or female."

"It's strange, very strange!" declared Tabor, with an air of great perplexity.

The young ladies had no clew to his troubles, and they had started to go on when he spoke again.

"Wait one moment. Are you going home?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell Captain Grandford to come here immediately?"

Norma hesitated. She had wished to keep secret the fact that they had been out, and the course proposed by Tabor would lead to the betrayal of a part of their own secret, while the rest would certainly be in danger from inquiries.

"It is only a short distance to the house—you can easily see my uncle, yourself," she returned.

"But I want to remain here. I am on track of the smugglers. I know that one of them met two persons in this shop—beyond doubt the last two were allies who pass here as respectable men—and I want to nab them. I thought I had them cornered here, and I watched for them to come out, but they gave me the slip, somehow. The shop is now empty. If you will tell Grandford, I stay here and watch until the captain comes."

The Government officer spoke in a way almost appealing, but he failed to awaken a spark of sympathy. Norma had not forgotten his charges against Robert, and she would gladly have shown her contempt for the man if she had not been afraid of making him more vindictive against Kendall.

It occurred to her, however, that if there was any truth in her last statement she might be standing in her lover's way, and liable to block any attempt to run down the smugglers.

"I will tell Captain Grandford, as you wish," she promised.

"Good! good! Thank you, and now—excuse me!"

The officer took a few quick steps, reached a rock and dropped behind it.

"I'll watch from here," he added, in a low voice. "Tell Grandford just where to find me. There's a lot of boards and stuff in the shop, and the smuggler and his allies may be inside now. I'll keep up the watch. Pray don't lose time, ladies!"

The girls moved on, though Norma felt a singular reluctance to go. She had become interested in the drama. Perhaps, if the unknown men whom Tabor had mentioned could be captured, the innocence of Robert Kendall would be proved. Norma had rather remain than go, unsuitable as the occupation would have been.

Their homeward path made a curve at that point, passing directly around the end of the long, low shanty, and their range of view was soon transferred from the front to rear.

As they reached the latter point both instinctively glanced along the back of the structure, and then they came to a simultaneous halt. The scene was not one without life—instead, some object was projecting beyond the line of the wall, like the head and shoulders of an animal emerging from its den.

The likeness was striking, for in this case the

head and shoulders of a man were projecting beyond an opening in the wall.

"Be still!" whispered Norma, grasping Albia's arm.

The caution was not necessary, for Albia was too much frightened to do anything else. They were stannid in shadow, and remained unseen.

There was the briefest possible delay, and then the man wriggled quickly out of the opening and scrambled to his feet. Before he had fully gained this position another head had appeared, and the body of a man followed. Nor was he the last—a third came after him; and the trio stood erect together.

Here was proof of Tabor's assertion that he had cornered three men in the shanty, and it was plain that they were on the point of escaping, but neither girl made a movement toward giving the alarm.

Why did they refrain?

Let the near future tell.

No time was lost by the men. As soon as the last had gained his feet, they began to retreat together.

Norma touched Albia's arm, and spoke in a hard voice.

"Follow me!" she briefly directed.

"Do you think—"

"I think nothing now. Come!"

Albia's unfinished question had been tremulous, but Norma's reply was in her former hard voice.

The course of the men was directly toward the center of the village, but they had not gone far when there was a separation. One of the three left the others, and taking a course at right-angles with the former one, hurried off with long steps. The remaining two kept their former course, and after them went the girls as before.

It was not far to the Westerley house. The men passed the door and turned the corner, but Norma, still retaining her hold upon Albia's arm, hurriedly entered.

"Close the door!" directed Miss Westerley, almost imperiously, "and then come to the west room."

She ran quickly up the stairs as she spoke. Her companion was slow to follow—indeed, there was a reluctance about her movements which indicated a desire to avoid further connection with a work which, plainly, was agitating her greatly. She obeyed, however, and went to the west room—which was a spare chamber.

She found Norma kneeling by the open window.

The latter motioned her to approach.

She complied, and, looking out, saw the two men standing close by the house.

"I wonder if Tabor is still watching?"

The words were uttered by one of the men, and were accompanied with a laugh.

"He gave us a close call," answered the second.

"If there hadn't been so much rubbish in the shop, he would have found us, sure."

"Is there fear that he recognized us?"

"I think not."

"Our smuggler friend is safe by this time."

"Yes, if he has made good use of his legs."

"I am not wholly satisfied with this affair, David. If Tabor did know us, he might get us into a fix. Wouldn't it be well for us to destroy what lace we have here?"

"Yes. We'll do it at once. And, by the way, it is not the safest thing in the world for us to stand here. We had better go in."

"You're right."

They turned, went to the side-door and entered the house. Norma arose and faced Albia. Both had recognized the men. The recognition had been partial at the shanty; it had been made complete at the house.

The men had been David and Edgar Westerley.

Faint as was the light in the room, it showed each girl a pale face opposite her own, and Norma's voice was husky as she spoke.

"I am going to retire at once, Albia; I cannot talk to-night. Let what we have seen remain a secret forever!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LAKE-SHORE LETTER.

THE following morning the landlord of the hotel was putting his place in order when two men entered.

"Good-morning, Mr. Yellowbird," he said, politely, as he recognized the foremost. "You have been out for your morning walk, I see, an'—Great Scott!"

The speaker broke off and stared blankly at the second man. There stood Texas Tartar, as well and strong as ever.

"Top of the morning to you, Dumley," the detective coolly saluted.

"Holy smoke! I thought you was dead."

"I have been."

"You have, eh?"

"Just so; but that is a mere trifle to me. Bear in mind that I am The Man with Nine Lives. The fact that I lose one now and then is a mere trifle; I have several more in stock, like a cat."

"But I thought you was shot and drowned."

"I'll bet you a V, Mr. Dumley, that I am not!"

"Bless you, my dear sir, I wouldn't traffic in the lives of my guests, anyhow. I'm delighted to see you safe—I am, by George, sir!"

"Thanks. There was a man shot, but it was not I."

"Mr. Tartar, it was Providence that saved you."

"A good opinion for me to hold, but I'm afraid the other man would not coincide with us."

"I never thought of that, by George! But come to the bar, gents. What'll you take?"

"A cigar."

"Nothing wet?"

"Not for me."

"I'll skip mine, too," Yank added. "I don't go very heavy on fluid irritation. Some species on't is most egregious good in emergencies, but you don't want ter crowd the emergencies. Whisky is mortal bad fur the newrolgy, an', besides, everybody o' the Yellowbird pedigree is, was, an' will be, down on havin' chemical 'speriments made in their stummicks. I knowed a man once who used ter dabble in chemicals, an' one day he blowed himself up. I dunno as he did it with whisky, but it ain't a safe drug ter wrestle with. Thank ye, landlord, but I'll do without the decoction, an' you may credit me twenty cents on my bill, or give it ter Moses in extra feed."

Texas Tartar had lighted his cigar, and the two men went up-stairs, leaving the landlord as much perplexed as ever to understand how The Man with Nine Lives happened to be a live man, instead of one of "the silent majority."

"Now then," said Texas Tartar, with energy, when they were alone in their room, "produce your mysterious letter."

"I'm egregious glad you're back ter help me tussle with it—I am, by hurley!" Yank declared.

"I may get thrown, but I am anxious to have a trial. Our game is drawing near a crisis, and every point tells now."

"It needs ter, I consait."

Yank had carefully guarded the letter which the wind had brought to him on the lake-shore. He now brought it out, and the detective read it through slowly and carefully. This done, he made comment briefly:

"To Eve Hendricks from her faithless lover, sure."

"Should say so."

"This man was connected with the smugglers, but only secretly. In the eyes of the world he was a very respectable man. All this, as you before said, is revealed in the letter."

"To be sure."

"Eve discovered his connection with them and told him so. He was alarmed; the whole tone of this letter shows it. What we want to know now is, did his desertion drive Eve to suicide, or did his fears that she would betray him lead him to remove her?"

Texas Tartar looked meaningfully at the mountaineer, and the latter nodded several times in succession.

"This is what we must learn," the detective added. "Our next point is in regard to Norma Westerley, or 'the young mistress of Westerley house,' as she is called here. The writer thinks 'it will not be possible to deceive her much longer.' Also, he says, 'she must not suspect us.' Again, Eve had declared that 'the young mistress,' and so forth, had more influence than she over the writer. Suggestive, isn't it?"

"Egregiously so."

"We must admit that the majority of persons, reading this, would say positively that Robert Kendall was the writer."

"Fack, Texas."

"We will not rush to a decision, but one thing we must admit—Eve's lover was either an inmate of the Westerley house, or Norma's close friend. Were it otherwise, Eve would have asserted that Norma had so much influence over the writer of this, nor would he have declared that it would not be possible to deceive Norma much longer. All this narrows the field. The faithless lover was Kendall or one of the Westerley family. Question: Shall we suspect Robert, David or Edgar?"

"You say," returned Yank, stroking his beard with great satisfaction at his ally's power of presenting evidence.

"I will present a point, friend Nevermiss. Eve said that her lover was connected with the smugglers. Well, at the smugglers' store-house we found a blanket marked Westerley, and when you used a little strategy you found out, positively, that there were blankets in Westerley's house just like it. Now, which would be most likely to furnish a blanket from that house to the smugglers—Robert, David or Edgar?"

"Land o' Goshen! I do b'lieve you're a wizard, Texas. An' this seems ter throw the guilt onter David or Edgar."

"Be not hasty, mountaineer. Let me see the blanket which Miss Westerley gave you."

Yank brought out the article named, and Texas Tartar subjected it to a careful examination. Like the veteran, he pronounced it the exact mate of the blanket they had found in the free-traders' store-house.

"Next," he continued, "we want to learn who wrote this note. Beyond doubt, the writing is somewhat disguised—the peculiar, erratic formation of the letters proves that—but it's a mighty good man, Yank, who can wholly hide his identity thus, if any one is on the track."

"Ef I's ter write," quoth Yank, shaking his index finger at his friend, "you couldn't tell it from the tracks o' a hen with the brown-keel croup."

"To learn who wrote this," resumed Texas Tartar, "we must get specimens of the writing of all parties we think can have possibly been concerned in the matter. This we will do by strategy, giving them no cause for suspicion. Understand?"

"I do, an' I must say you plan it mortal wal. Now, ef we kin only do as wal, we shall—"

A rap sounded at the chamber door. Texas Tartar arose and opened it—the landlord was outside.

"Ed Westerley is hyar, and he'd like to see you," announced Mr. Dumley.

"Send him right up."

The landlord turned away, and Texas Tartar went back to Yank.

"Before Mr. Edgar Westerley leaves us I will have a specimen of his writing," was the confident assertion.

"Go in, Texas; go right in on yer muskle. I like your way, by hurley! You remind me o' another detective partner I had once, who was called Central Pacific Paul. He had the same knack fur gittin' at things, an' he 'bout always won. Had a most tremenjous time with him, workin' ag'in' the train-wreckers."

Quick, light steps were heard, and Edgar made his appearance.

"Welcome back, sir!" he exclaimed, extending his hand with an air of cordiality. "You have been marked down all through the village as a dead man."

"I presume it was not generally known that I was The Man with Nine Lives," gravely replied the detective.

"Hardly!" answered Westerley, smiling. "I did not know that, but I'm glad to see you safe. And now, to come right to the point, the whole village is agog to know how you escaped. I am just as bad, and here I am to hint—broadly, as you see—that the story would interest me."

"It's the simplest thing in the world."

"Then I judge that you were not shot."

"Not to my knowledge. Friend Yank was unnecessarily alarmed about me, you see. I sighted several men in a boat and tried to follow them, thinking they might be smugglers, but I couldn't run on shore, over rocks and through bushes, as fast as they could go in their boat."

"I thought you went in the boat, also?"

"Yank labored under the same belief."

The mountaineer concealed a smile by stroking his sparse beard with zeal. Texas Tartar had gone in the boat, and Yank knew it, but the fact was not to be told abroad.

"What news did you get of the smugglers?" continued Edgar, with interest.

The detective made a gesture of disgust.

"I hate to confess it, but I finally lost sight of them. I was more plucky than wise, and got into a country where no stranger could find his way without a compass. I lost my bearings, wandered around curiously, thought it was all up with me, but finally struck the right track and got back home. Those fellows may have been smugglers, but I can't prove but that they were the men who played the mischief with Rip Van Winkle."

There was an evasion in all that he said, but it was so skillfully disguised that Edgar suspected nothing.

An expression of disappointment, real or feigned, was upon young Westerley's face.

"I had hoped you might have some clew," he answered. "I firmly believe that if we could find the free traders, Robert Kendall would be cleared of one charge."

"It would please me greatly to see him cleared."

Westerley grasped the speaker's hand warmly.

"Thank you, sir; thank you. I am positive that he is equally innocent of connection with the smugglers and the assault on Grizzly George; and now, being sure of your sympathy, I would like to have a confidential talk with you."

CHAPTER XXXI.

DID EVE COMMIT SUICIDE?

THIS suggestion was very pleasant to Texas Tartar.

"Go right on, Mr. Westerley," he replied. "I shall be glad to hear you."

"It is my opinion," declared Edgar, "that this matter is all the deep plot of a man who wishes to rival Kendall as a suitor for my sister's hand."

"That looks likely, but who is the man?"

"I haven't the least idea, but I will come to that anon. First, as to my reasons for believing it. It seems that when Grizzly George returned from Eve's funeral he found in his house an anonymous letter which accused Kendall. This was the first blow. Blow number two was when my sister was drugged to interrupt the wedding."

I say she was drugged, and I believe it. The doctor says so, though, unfortunately, he cannot prove it; and her previous good health is another item of proof. Blow number three was the assault upon Grizzly George. Possibly the real criminal meant to kill him; probably, he did not. Anyway, he had laid the lines for an accusation against Kendall—even if George had never spoken—by his anonymous letter. That was still on George's person, and would have been a silent accuser."

"You make a strong case," admitted Texas Tartar, "but who was the man?"

"Now I am wholly at loss. I don't know of any man who aspired to rival Kendall."

"Well, what next?"

"The doctor is strongly of the opinion that the drug used upon my sister may have been purchased at Jacob Ilbrahim's store. He keeps patent medicines—why not drugs?"

"Have you seen him?"

"The doctor has. Ilbrahim denies selling anything of the kind, and says he has never kept anything but harmless patent medicines."

"Does this settle it?"

"It does not; I would not believe the Ilbrahams under oath."

"Ilbrahim, senior, has a son?"

"Yes."

"Can he have been the rival?"

"Heavens! no," replied Edgar, with a gesture of disgust. "That creature would not dare to look at Norma."

Texas Tartar was not so sure of that, but, remembering the peculiar wording of the letter then in his pocket, he felt sure that Levi Ilbrahim was not the ex-lover of Eve Hendricks.

"Do you wish to direct my attention to any one man whom you suspect?" he asked.

"No," responded Edgar. "I would if I could, but I am all at sea."

"Then do another thing to help the good cause," continued the detective. "I am almost a stranger here—will you write off a list of every unmarried man in town who is under the age of thirty-five, giving notes on each, with your opinion of him as a man and as to the possibility that he may be the guilty person?"

Yank Yellowbird's eyes brightened as he saw the trap laid at last. Would Edgar walk into it and give them a specimen of his writing?

Edgar answered without hesitation:

"Willingly. Whatever I can do to help you shall be done. Have you paper?"

Texas Tartar answered in the affirmative, and Westerley was soon put in possession of the necessary materials. He wrote one line, and then paused and smiled.

"I have begun with these words: 'List of Doubtful Persons.' Shall I put myself first?"

"Hardly," returned Texas Tartar, with a responsive smile. "You and I, and your brother, are not to be considered."

"Nor me," quoth Yank Yellowbird. "I'm past thirty-five, an' too old ter bedrafted, though my gran'father fit like hurley arter he was up'ards o' seventy-nine year old, but he was more posted on the tick-tacks than I be."

"If he could beat you in a fight, your reputation belies you," observed Edgar, as he began to write.

Yank watched him closely, anxious to know the result of the test, but found time to talk.

"It's egregious queer," he declared, "how a man o' peace like me ever got the name o' bein' a fighter. I'm as weak at it as I should be at dancin'. Ever practyse in that line, Texas?"

"I did a little dancing when young."

"I remember right plain," added Yank, seriously, "the fu'st ball I ever 'tended—yes; an' 'twas my last, too. I didn't want ter go, but my marm tackled me, an' was bound I should come out in socksity, as she called it. She fixed me up in a big red neck-tie an' a dickey—they wore that atrocious sort o' collar in them days—the eends o' which stuck out past my chin-bone like blinders on a boss. I felt egregious uncomfor'ble in the rig, but I'd made up my mind ter go in on my muskle, dance like a jumpin'-jack, an' make a condemn'd commotion in the hearts o' the gals."

"This feelin' lasted till I got ter the ball, but I admt it left me sudden when I seen all the gals thar, with their pooty clo'se on an' their eyes as bright as diamonds. I stood 'round a bit, but my hands seemed drestfully in the way, an' I went over in the corner an' sat down behind the wood-box."

"I stayed thar until they'd danced sev'ral figgers, an' I grew more miser'ble all the while. I'd jest made up my mind ter sneak out, when up came Susannah Parsons—a right pooty gal, with red hair an' active dispersion."

"It's ladies' choice," sez she, lookin' amazin' smilin', "an' I choose you, Mr. Yellowbird," sez she.

"Wh-wh-what?" sez I, scart 'most out o' my wits."

"Hurry up!" sez she; "it's the Devil's Dream!"

"I thought then she was swearin', but I found out arterwards that 'Devil's Dream' was the name o' the dance; but I couldn't 'a' reproved her fur profanity, then, ef the parson an' all the deacons had 'ben lookin' ter me fur a good egg-sample. I's so scared, I shook like a leaf."

"I can't dance," sez I, in despair.

"I'll show ye," sez she, snickerin'.

"I'm tired," sez I; "we've 'ben layin' wall ty the south pastur', an'—"

"That's all I said, then, fur I'll be condemn'd ef thet gal didn't lay holt on me, an' pull me right out on the floor. She sot me up in a line, an' thar I stood like a stick, my face as red as a turkey-gobbler's head, an' the perspiration oozin' out at ev'ry pore. Ev'rybody was giglin', an' they all looked at me; an' I declare, I'd give my half interest in dad's brindled heifer ef I'd 'ben at home with my mother."

"Pooty soon the fiddle struck up, an' the dancers all began ter kite around—all but me. I stood still, an' Lot's wife wa'n't no comparison ter how miser'ble I was. I wouldn't 'a' stirred a step, but Susannah, she got me by the arm an' sent me a-flyin' som'ers; an' ev'ry time I tried ter hold up I got a push from somebody else; an' I consait they kept me at it lively."

"I hadn't the least idee what they was all tryin' ter do. They skipped about like mad, no two goin' the same way, an' no one doin' the same thing twice. Mehbe that's why they called it the 'Devil's Dream,' but ef the devil ever had a dream as bad as that, I pity him—I do, by hurley! Wal, when I seen they wouldn't let me stan' still, I went in on my muskle. I rushed about hyar an' thar, dodgin' the other parties as wal as I could—though I run inter some on 'em with a voylent shock—but it did beat all natur' how clumsy some o' them gals got ter be arter a bit. Turn which way I would, a gal was sure ter run ag'in' me; an' pooty soon two come at once, an' I lost my balance, an' down I went on the floor with a shock that rattled the chimbley."

The mountaineer paused, shook his head solemnly, and then added:

"I dunno as I'd ever got out on't alive, but the fiddle let up jist then, an' the misery was over. Ev'rybody scooted ter the benches used fur seats, an' thar was me a-sprawlin' on the floor. I got up as soon's I could, though, an' then I seen the hull gang was snickerin' like mad, an' lookin' at me. I may be wrong, but I had an idee they was makin' fun o' me, an' I bolted out o' that place like hurley."

"My dickey was so wet with perspiration it hung down over my coat-collar, an' my pooty red neck-tie was spiled; an' when I got home I remembered as how Parson Jimson said dancin' was a sin. I allowed he was right, an' I never tried it ag'in."

"You had a very serious time," laughed Edgar, as he finished writing. "Here is the list, Texas Tartar. You will find the name of every man there, with my comments. Of course you will regard it as confidential."

"Certainly," replied the detective.

Westerley extended the list, and The Man with Nine Lives looked at the closely-written page. He seemed to be reading, but, really, was studying the chirography. One glance was enough to show him that it was very much unlike the writing in the letter. Having previously decided that this was disguised, he looked for betraying minor points, like the "loop" of some particular letter, or the manner of forming any part of the several characters.

He could see nothing of the kind, but this did not prove but that future examination might develop something new.

"I will pay due attention to your hints, Mr. Westerley," the detective said, as he laid the paper aside.

"Next," resumed Edgar, seriously, "I would like to call your attention to one point."

"Proceed, sir."

"Do you believe that Eve Hendricks committed suicide?"

Texas Tartar's face assumed a look of surprise, real or feigned.

"What room is there to doubt it?" he asked.

Edgar moved uneasily in his chair.

"I hardly know how to explain, but I hold the theory that she was not in a state of mind to take her own life. She had discovered that the man, whoever he was, had tired of her, and I think she had tired of him."

"What evidence is there to that effect?"

"None, perhaps."

"Then there is her letter to her father, saying that she was tired of life, since her lover had deserted her, and she was resolved to end it."

"The letter may have been a forgery."

"Done by whom?"

"The faithless lover."

"Then you infer that he killed her?"

"Possibly he hired it done. There are men around here who would not hesitate to do such a thing, as the tragedy at the Point of Pines proves. Possibly the faithless lover was connected with the smugglers. If he was, Eve may have known of the fact, and, accusing him, brought down upon her head the anger which led to her death."

"Have you any evidence to this effect?"

"I am giving you a theory. Possibly there is nothing in it, for I am not a detective, lawyer or far-seer."

Edgar smiled, and seemed to wish to raise the conversation to a lighter plane, but Texas Tartar easily detected an evasion.

"Can we help Kendall's cause by proving that the girl was murdered?" he asked.

"Not unless we can learn who killed her," Westerley answered.

"Can you suggest any way to do that?"

"Not at present; but I believe the name of the real ex-lover is on the paper I gave you. Which one of the lot it is I have no idea. I am trying to learn, and if you will add your help I shall be grateful. I dread to think what may be the result to my sister if Robert is killed. Help us all you can, sir, and you shall be rewarded generously."

Edgar arose to go as he finished speaking.

CHAPTER XXXII.

KENDALL'S STARTLING STATEMENT.

THERE was no objection to Edgar's departure, and, after a few more words, he left the room. Yank looked inquiringly at Texas Tartar, and observed that the latter's face was fixed in a very thoughtful expression. Silence continued several moments, and he again took up Edgar's list. Placing it beside the letter, he compared the writing carefully, and then put both away.

"What d'ye make on't?" Yank asked.

"It is safe to bet that Edgar did not write the letter you found on the lake-shore."

"No likeness in the writin', eh?"

"Not a particle."

"Do ye now onderstand Edgar fully?"

"Not by any means. His theory that Eve did not commit suicide is surprising, for I do not know upon what he builds his belief; and I am positive that he was not dealing openly with us. He kept something back."

"Jes' my idee."

"What was it?"

"Don't know, by hurley!"

"Nor I. He perplexes me. If Kendall were not the lover of his sister, I should think him determined to send the prisoner to the gallows by bringing up the theory of murder. Edgar is a fair-seeming young man, and does not have the appearance of a criminal. If, indeed, he wishes to tighten the net about Kendall, it is because he is himself guilty, thinks his case desperate, and believes some victim must be found. I would not say this about him, did I not believe him to be keeping something back—something of importance."

"Good 'eal mixed up, I consait."

"Never mind; we will soon have the clew."

The detective spoke confidently, and, rising, approached the window. Looking out he saw Norma Westerley passing, and his thoughts found utterance in words.

"She is going to visit Kendall."

He had surmised correctly, as the sequel proved.

Norma remained as loyal as ever, disregarding possible public prejudice and all else. On this occasion she had but little time to spare, but she was anxious to encourage her lover all she could.

She reached the jail and was admitted to his presence, but the first glance sufficed to show that some change had come over him. He had been calm and resolute, but now looked worried and restless.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked, when their greeting was over.

"Everything seems to be wrong," Kendall replied, gloomily. "I have tried to be reconciled to this, thinking a little investigation would show me innocent, but it is not so. Here I am, and liable to remain. I find disgrace associated with my name, and untold calamities staring me in the face."

"Do not be discouraged. Nearly every one believes you innocent, and those who know you best are positive of it. It is hard, but be as patient as you can and help will come—the truth will prevail."

The prisoner looked cautiously around, and then lowered his voice as he replied:

"I am now thinking of quicker relief."

"What do you mean?"

"Why should I, an innocent man, wait for acquittal of charges made by a hot headed officer and a fever-stricken, delirious hunter? I maintain that there is positively no evidence upon which I should have been arrested in a more civilized country. Now, as relief is slow in coming, I am going to meet it half-way."

He spoke with an intensity which troubled Norma, and her utterance was faint as she mechanically asked:

"How?"

"I am going to escape!"

"Escape?"

"Yes. It is the most feasible thing in the world. This so-called jail is a farce, and even a namby-pamby prisoner like me can get out."

"But will it not look like guilt?"

"Yes—until the real criminals are found."

"Suppose you should be recaptured?"

"I shall not be. When I leave Powderhorn Mile, I shall go disguised."

"How can you get a disguise here?"

"Very easily," Kendall answered, smiling.

"I have the articles ready for me. Some weeks ago I procured the means for another purpose, little suspecting this emergency would rise. At a certain point, outside the village, I have hidden a false beard and a wig. They will change

my appearance completely, for, while I am dark-haired, the wig and beard are of a pronounced blonde color!"

Norma snuck back. The color had gone from her face with a swift rush; her eyes were enlarged and startled; and she felt pitifully weak and miserable.

The blonde wig and false beard again!

And Mrs. Jenkins had declared that Eve Hendricks's treacherous lover had worn just such a disguise!

Robert Kendall was too much excited to notice how his words had affected Norma. Little suspecting the blow he had dealt her, he rapidly continued:

"This disguise is perfect, and with it in place I could almost remain in town and be safe, but I shall not risk it. I shall go a few miles away and wait until the storm blows over, the real culprits are detected, and I can return here safely."

He paused and looked at his companion.

"The idea affects you, Norma," he observed, kindly.

"It is bold," she murmured, faintly.

"Bold strokes are always the best."

"Does any one here know you have the blonde wig and beard?"

"No; no one who is now here," Kendall replied, after brief hesitation.

The words were terribly suggestive. Did he think of Eve Hendricks, who was no longer there, as he made reply?

Norma's blood seemed to have turned to ice, but she compelled herself to seek one more item of evidence.

"Where did you buy them?"

"Of Amos Nash, the traveling peddler."

There was no further question to ask; the chain was fatally complete. Mrs. Jenkins had stated that though she did not know who Eve Hendricks's treacherous lover had been, he had purchased his blonde wig and false beard of Amos Nash.

"Don't look at this too seriously," added Kendall, noticing Norma's pallor, but little suspecting its cause. "I am not guilty, and it is not right for me to stay here. I propose to escape and remain in hiding until the truth comes out and I am cleared. Of course you will keep this secret from every one, even Captain Grandford and your brothers. I'm not going to-night—in fact, I may persuade myself to stay here two days more. Then I shall go surely, and the disguise which has already served me well, shall again be my true friend."

It was upon Norma's lips to cry out, "Do you think me blind?" for it was adding bitterness to misery to refer to the other occasion when the disguise had served him—what woman would not have been jealous, then, even of a dead rival!—but the retort was forced back. Something—perhaps he noticed how miserable she looked—caused Kendall to suddenly stoop, take her face between his hands and kiss her; and in a moment more her woman's heart reasserted its sway.

"He is not guilty!" was the strong but silent cry of that heart; "he is innocent, and I will not believe otherwise!"

Remorse is a potent factor in some cases, and during the remainder of her visit the girl was unusually affectionate. She did not advise Kendall to go or stay, but her devotion was so apparent that she left him in a far more contented frame of mind.

Later, when she was walking home, she met Texas Tartar. She did not feel like talking with any one, and as he did not try to do more than bow to her, there was no conversation. When she had gone a few paces, something impelled her to look back. The tall, strong, graceful detective was walking away, unconscious of her gaze. She sighed and went on. What the sigh meant, let him tell who can read a woman's mind.

Perhaps the cynic would say that a lover out of prison was better than one in prison.

Norma endeavored to retain her usual spirits, but memory of the blonde wig and false beard haunted her, and when she reached home she went at once to her room.

Greatly to her surprise she found Albia there, kneeling by a chair and weeping almost convulsively.

Norma was about to embrace the friend she loved like a sister, and ask the cause of her grief, but she caught sight of a half-folded paper which lay upon the floor, and this gave her a new idea.

She quickly picked it up, and, almost at a glance, read the few lines of writing it contained:

"The goods will positively be landed the night of the 18th. We are suspected on this side, and must delay no longer. If you hear more from the beaks, let us know. They will interfere with us at their peril!"

Norma finished reading, and spoke quickly:

"What is this?"

Albia sprang to her feet and confronted her companion with a startled air, but made no reply.

"I repeat, where did you get this note?"

"I found it in the hall just after—after

David passed along," replied Albia, in a husky whisper.

"The goods will positively be landed the night of the 18th," quoted Miss Westerley. "Great heavens! and it was on the night of the 18th that the officers were killed at the Point of Pines."

"Oh, Norma, David did not know of it—I know he did not!"

"How came this note in our house?"

"Heaven only knows."

"Heaven and the guilty wretch! Look and see its fate!"

Calmly Norma struck a match and applied it to the paper. The latter burned to a fragment. Then, and not till then, did Norma's calmness desert her. Tears dimmed her eyes, and she turned and put her arms round Albia.

"Sister," she said, brokenly, "I know your secret; you love David. There was a time I would have been overjoyed, but now upon you and your love, and upon me, and upon all in this house of mysteries, rests a dark and terrible curse!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HUNTING STRANGE GAME.

TIM PURCELL sat by the door of his boat-house, the following morning, slowly smoking his short, black pipe, but, if appearances were to be trusted, even the soothing weed failed to put him in a contented frame of mind. He looked at the boat rocking idly by his home-made pier—they might as well have been in the boat-house—and shook his head mournfully.

"It's de devil's own luck!" he declared, solemnly. "Begorra, it's meself is thinking Oi shall have ter be loike de parties in de Bible, an' gird up me lions an' go out an' make me home in a new land. Phat's de use ave stayin' here? Toime was whin business was brisk an' all wint loively as a marriage bell. How is it noow? Thrade is kilt di'der than Adam, an' all along ave de blamed Horned Fish. Dhat varmint has been the ruin ave me!"

"Timothy, you're to be pitied!"

The boatman looked up quickly at sound of the voice, and saw Texas Tartar and Yank Yellowbird.

"A hearty wilcome, gentlemen, ave ye come with good will; but bad 'cess to yez ef ye would make sport ave me ill luck."

"Not a sport, Tim. Like you, we don't love the Horned Fish."

"May Ould Nick fly away wid him!"

"So you want to get rid of the Fish?"

"Do Oi? Howly Pater! Oi should say so!"

"Providence helps those who help themselves. Why not rid Rifle Lake of the monster, yourself?"

"Me?"

"You, honest Tim."

"Begorry, they say powder an' bullet will niver do him a harrum."

"You were out hunting him the night I was shot."

"Oi thought you wasn't shot."

"Oh! but I was. Bear in mind that I am The Man with Nine Lives!"

"An' roight good luek ye have to possiss thim. Well, I did go huntin' de crathur, but niver a fish did me eyes set on."

"Would you go again, with Yank and me for your companions?"

"Would Oi? Only show me the chance! Go hunt de Horned Fish? Well, Oi should smile! Wid such pardners as yous, Oi'd go hunt annywhere, an' de Horned Fish is de special game Oi banker to git at. Begorra, the spalpane has spoiled me thrade, an' dhere is no law in the Good Book that forbids our bein' revenged on our enemies when they're fish."

"Not much, thar ain't," Yank agreed, "but don't le's stop ter talk about it. The newrolgy is snappin' my jints like the mischief, an' I've got ter walk ter git red on't. Texas, I've heerd my gran'father, the Revolutionary relict, say thar was seventeen men in his regiment so egregiously laid up with rheumatiz they couldn't walk, jest afore the battle o' Sheppens, but when the liberty boys got licked by the Britishers, them cripples jumped right ter the head o' the column, an' they led the retreat all the way ter Newbu'g, whar Washin'ton had his quarter-heads. My cousin, Sallie Millie Annie Hattie Yellowbird, the poetess, writ a string o' verses long as yer arm, on the subjick, of a cursastic natur'. She called it a pasture-poem, 'cause the battle was at the Sheppens."

"Pastoral poem, is the term, I think."

"Means the same thing, the only difference bein' in the way you let go o' the syllables an' roll the vowels an' consternations. Them, Timothy, is the divisions o' letters. Onderstand 'em?"

"Niver a bit. Oi know nothing about books, schools or the loike."

"I'll give ye lessons when I have time. Ye see, the letters o' the alphabit are divided inter three classes. The vowels are a, e, i, u an' our relations; the consternations are g, h, x an' z, an' all the rest are called dip'thongs, 'cause you've got ter dip inter them a good 'eal ter fill up yer words."

By the time this erudite information was com-

pleted, the trio were walking rapidly toward the north end of the village. Purcell had no idea where they were going, or whether a definite plan was in view, but he held his companions in great respect, and was ready to follow wherever they might lead.

When once beyond the line of houses, Texas Tartar turned conversation to a more serious subject.

"Mr. Purcell, I take it you are a brave man."

"O'm an Oirishman!" was the sturdy reply.

"Enough said; you seem to be sure of your grip. It is only fair, however, that I should warn you what to expect. There may be hard fighting in which men, as well as other things, will figure, but I hope the result will be to rid Rifle Lake of the Horned Fish."

"Then l'ade the way, an' to dhe mischief wid danger. Oi n'ade a bit ave foighting to stir me blood, anyway."

"Good! I will say no more, except to add that we expect to go direct to where the Horned Fish is."

"The critter goes ter roost by day," explained Yank, "summat like an owl. The only difference is, an owl roosts high an' the egregious fish roosts low."

Following the line of the lake-shore the men went rapidly forward until the Point of Pines was reached. There they crossed to the east shore, swimming the narrow strait, and found themselves in the wildest part of the lake country. Honest Tim began to look curious, but his faith in his guides was strong, and he made no inquiries.

They still followed the line of the shore, but when half a mile had been left between them and the Point of Pines, the detective stopped and nodded to Yank.

"Go on, mountaineer!" he directed.

Not a word answered the veteran, but changing his step to a soft, cat-like tread, he glided away among the trees. Texas Tartar did not seem inclined to talk, and Tim, to show that he could act the stoic, took a generous bite of tobacco and settled down to wait.

Ten minutes passed, and then Nevermiss returned with the same light tread.

"The atrocious insex is thar," he observed, with a nod. "It's layin' in a nook close in land, under the bushes in part."

"Any men visible?"

"No."

"We will attack at once."

"All ready!" quoth Tim, ready to fight, though he did not know what they were to meet.

"It may be a hot fracas," cautioned Yank, "but I consait we're good fur all we meet. We're wal armed, an' full o' vim an' muskle. Might call us the Strong Arm Squad—a military term which would delight my gran'father, by hurley!"

"Lead on, Nevermiss!"

"They advanced again, while Tim kept sharp watch for the first sign of the unknown foe. There was a mystery about the matter which rendered it interesting."

For some distance their way was over nearly level ground; then the surface ascended gradually, forming a ridge which made out sharply into the lake. One glance was enough to show that it was well adapted to concealment for whatever might see fit to hide there, and it was no surprise when the mountaineer turned to the left.

He went upright a few paces; then, with a gesture to his companions, dropped upon his knees. They followed his example, and the three went crawling along carefully. Near the extreme point of land rocks, bushes and vines mingled in wild confusion, but Yank found his way as unerringly as he had done before, and finally reached a flat rock where he paused.

Parting the vines in front he motioned Texas Tartar to look down. The latter obeyed, and an interesting scene was revealed to his gaze.

Twenty feet below, water was visible. It was only a tongue-shaped spur which made back into the ridge, and on three sides it met perpendicular rocks which rose to where the searchers were.

The recess below was far from light, for bushes and vines were at and over the entrance, almost totally concealing it, but the few rays of sunlight which struggled through the natural curtain served to show that the recess was not empty.

Midway between the rocky walls a dark, oval, oblong object rose slightly above the water, and the detective knew he was looking upon the far-famed Horned Fish.

Alhe?

Living or dead, there was no perceptible motion as he gazed at it, nor did he expect any. He drew back and Tim was told to look, which he did with eyes which soon dilated. He was the image of amazement as he turned again, but Texas Tartar's gesture to request silence was not necessary. Tim was as wise as he was brave.

All his attention, though, suddenly became fixed upon Yank Yellowbird. The latter had drawn a coil of rope from under his coat and secured one end to a firm, cone-shaped point of rock. He now dropped the loose end down the

fi ssure. It fell lightly upon the Horned Fish, but that formidable monster did not stir.

Nevermiss grasped the rope with both hands and evinced an inclination to descend, but paused with his limbs hanging over. Even then his humorous fancy was active, and the old, quaint smile moved his bronzed face.

"Ef the atrocious insex should swaller me as Jonah Yellowbird was swallered by the whale, I trust, Texas, you'll see my case properly writ up, put on the fam'ly records an' given all the publicity o' Jonah's case. You might hang 'round a few days, too, ter see ef the Fish vomits me up, though it would be jest my condemn'd luck ter agree with him so that he'd keep me down."

With this whimsical remark the mountaineer grasped the rope more tightly, slid over the edge of the rock and went down, hand over hand, toward the lake monster.

Texas Tartar watched and waited, and finally imitated Yank's movements. He only paused to bid Tim follow, and then went down the rope.

Tim, looking down, saw both his allies standing on the Fish's back, but his Irish blood was up, and he would let no man go where he dared not follow.

He, too, parted from the rock and slid slowly down to meet whatever experience fate had in store for him.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FATAL CLOCK.

Tim's feet touched the lake monster's back, but still it lay immovable. More than this, it was clear that no other fish had a back like it—to Tim's feet it felt as hard as a floor.

Again Texas Tartar motioned for silence, and Yank stooped until his hand touched the fish's back. Tim saw the veteran lay hold of an iron ring—a queer ornament for a fish's spinal column!—and lift steadily. A small, square section of the oval top rose on hinges, and a cavity was revealed below.

"Howly Pater!" muttered Tim, under his breath.

Nevermiss did not hesitate. He put one foot into the cavity and followed it with the other, and so sunk slowly down with the detective at his heels. Again Tim brought up the rear. It seemed like inviting the Horned Fish to swallow them, even as Jonah was swallowed; but the Irishman found regular steps awaiting his feet.

The mysterious Horned Fish was transformed into an equally mysterious water-vessel, and a few steps took him to the cabin, or hold, or whatever the interior was called.

The intruders saw a long, low compartment, with a dim light burning at one end and various articles scattered about, but there was not sufficient light to show whether they were alone. The craft was larger than any stranger had ever suspected, but no space existed for many men or many inanimate things.

Were any man except themselves on board?

Yank took a few cautious steps forward and paused again, anxious to have the advantage of a surprise on their side if possible, but luck was against them. No motion of the craft was visible, but a tin dish suddenly fell from somewhere and went rattling across the floor.

Had it been a string attached to a jumping-jack it could not have had more decided or prompt effect.

Up leaped a man from the darkest corner, and in a moment more his voice rung out loudly:

"Treachery! Wake up, men; wake up!"

Before the words were out of his mouth other men were seen rising, and Yank added his voice to the sudden disturbance.

"At 'em, neighbors! Wade in an' flax the atrocious insex like hurley!"

The intruders sprang forward. Before a blow had been struck it became evident that the "Strong-Armed Squad" was outnumbered but they were not men to be daunted by that. They made an assault with vim, and that little cabin speedily became the scene of a desperate, confused struggle. It defied description—each of the invaders found a foeman, with some to spare, but the whole affair was decidedly mixed.

Back and forth they staggered, fighting as only strong men can, and lusty blows were given and received. Now and then there was a fall, and defiant shouts were blended with cries of pain, but no one man knew how the contest was going until, all of a sudden, Yank and his friends found themselves masters of the cabin. The mountaineer had a man under his knee; Tim sat astride a second; and Texas Tartar was menacing a third with his revolver.

Two more lay near at hand, unconscious.

The detective deftly handcuffed his man, but that exhausted his supply in that line. Ropes were at hand, however, and in a short time the whole party of strangers were rendered helpless.

"Land o' Goshen!" quoth Nevermiss, "that was a mighty lively tussle. Started the par-spiration out of my cuticle like hurley. A very remarkable skrimmage, take it all in all; an' it beats the 'sperience o' Jonah Yellowbird, my ancestor, all ter nothin'! Jonah went inter a whale's stummick like we hev, but I consait he didn't find no other men down thar ter wrastle with

—ef he did, he neglected ter mention it in his pussional memories, which he writ up fur the Yellowbird pedigree book."

"It b'ates dhe Ould Nick!" deposed Tim Purcell.

"To be sure; we *have* beat him, jest as you say. But now, frien's, we don't know how long we'll have a clear field hyar, an' I propose we git right ter work an' see the sights. Texas, you rummage inside—I want ter see the egregious sword with which this critter slashes other boats in two."

Before the veteran had ceased speaking he was on the steps, and he again mounted to the top. Dimas was the light there, he was not long in solving that point. The top of the strange craft was nearly all of solid wood, covered with sheet-iron, but near the bow, or front part, was an iron frame in which was set the sword, which, combined with a hard top and impetus of the craft, had done so much damage to frail boats.

The sword projected upward about two feet, and was a heavy contrivance well calculated for its purpose.

When Yank had satisfied his curiosity he returned to the cabin. He found Texas Tartar reading a manuscript paper, but the latter quietly passed it over to the mountaineer.

"Read!" he directed, with stern brevity.

Yank was not the most brilliant of scholars, but it required only one glance for him to discover that the writing in this note and in the letter he had found on the lake-shore was the work of the same hand. He read as follows:

"Be very careful about landing the next cargo. I have a semi-reliable report that several government officers are soon to be here, to watch for contraband goods. Run no unnecessary risks. I would advise that the Horned Fish be kept in the cove and the goods held back. My position here is too valuable to lose, and the wedding takes place next week."

"Should you land the goods, place them in the cave store-house as quickly and quietly as possible. I will convey a blanket to the cave which you can use to wrap around the lace's, to protect them from moisture. I cannot agree to have any goods stored in Westerley house. The family is so large that some one would be sure to find them, and that would expose us all—you know that Captain Grandford is a stout supporter of the law. This roof must cover no 'goods.'"

"In conclusion, it is better to be safe than brilliant. You may use your own judgment, but my idea is that it will be best to cease operations for awhile."

Yank looked up and met Texas Tartar's gaze. The detective made a gesture to enjoin silence, but this did not prevent the mountaineer from grasping several facts.

The writer of the unsigned note was shown by the penmanship to be identical with Eve Hendricks's ex-lover, and it seemed equally clear that he was a dweller in the Westerley house. Other points might as well apply to Robert Kendall as to one of the previously-mentioned family but the range of suspicion seemed restricted when the writer, after referring plainly to Westerley house, added, "This roof must cover no 'goods.'"

If that did not mean that the letter was written inside of the Westerley house, words went for nothing.

And the only males in that house, besides Captain Grandford, were David and Edgar—no men servants were employed.

Even then it occurred to Yank that Robert Kendall might have been the writer, and have written the letter at the house of his betrothed, but there was no time to dwell upon the matter.

Texas Tartar's voice broke the silence as he addressed one of the prisoners.

"I desire you to run this craft down to Powderhorn Mile," he said.

"Do you?" sneered the man.

"Yes."

"You can have it out in 'desirin'."

"What do you mean?"

"Neither I nor one of my mates will put finger ter the machinery!"

"Where is the machinery?"

"Find it yerself, ef you can."

"I depend upon you, and—"

"You depend in vain. Even ef you found the machinery, you couldn't run the boat. The motive power is a thing no outsider could understand. You can't run it, an' we won't!"

"Do you know that a revolver has strong persuasive powers?"

"It ain't got any fur me; an' I want ter tell you one thing more. Ef you stay here five minutes longer, you'll be blowed higher than the top o' Babel!"

"How's that?"

"In a certain part o' this craft is a keg o' powder. Connected with it is a wire that runs to a clock. Start this clock, an' at the end o' a given time it will strike upon the wire, drivin' the wire violently ag'in' a sort o' percussion cap. This cap will flash in the powder, an' this boat an' all in it will be blowed up!"

"A likely yarn."

"It's true, an', what is more, I have set the clock a-goin'. Listen!"

They obeyed, and a faint *click!-click!* was audible at some point hard to locate.

"Howly Pater!" cried Tim Purcell.

"Do you think you can make me believe you

would blow yourselves up?" demanded Texas Tartar.

"Believe what ye will, it's true. We ain't men ter stick at trifles. When we become the crew o' this boat we swore by all good an' holy that she should never fall inter the hands of others. That's why the clock was fixed, an' we hev set it a-goin'. Afore five minutes is gone, this boat goes flyin' ter glory!"

"St. Catherine defend us!" cried Tim, who had never agreed to fight such a foe.

He was not the only one moved. Texas Tartar saw very plainly that he had to deal with desperate men, and the stamp of truth was upon the bold speaker's face. The detective turned to his companions.

"March the prisoners out!" he directed. "We will test this matter, at least."

"I consait thar is several tons o' hoss-sense in what ye say, Texas—I do, by hurley!" Yank agreed.

The trio turned to their prisoners, who looked greatly relieved at the idea of leaving the craft, and the whole gang was started upward. Captors and captives alike stepped with alacrity, and as Texas Tartar, who brought up the rear, ascended the stairs, he heard the ticking of the death-clock behind them.

When the top was reached the spokesman of the prisoners looked around somewhat anxiously.

"My advice is that we all go ther quickest way. Tied as my hands be, I'd rather take my chances in the water than ter risk a slow climb. A few foot away the water is not over breast-deep. Shall we jump?"

The influence of the hidden danger was upon Texas Tartar, moving him as he had rarely ever been moved before, and he tersely replied:

"Jump!"

Almost immediately there was a series of splashes as the several men sprang into the lake. There was method in their movements, and they had only a short distance to go to be safe, but, as the hands of the prisoners were tied, they required some aid to reach shallow water.

Prompt action took them to the shore.

All remained quiet, and the detective began to think he had been hoaxed, but the silence was suddenly broken.

A roar burst upon the air; there was a rending, tearing sound; and then rocks, bushes and other objects went flying high in air.

The shock flung every man to the ground, though neither that nor the subsequent fall of the up-hurled material did serious injury; and when all was over Texas Tartar went forward to see the result of the explosion.

A mass of bent, twisted metal at the bottom of the water, between the ragged, riven rocks, was all that remained of the once-dreaded Horned Fish!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE HUTS ON THE HILLSIDE.

TIME has moved on to another mile-stone since the events of the last chapter. Another night has fallen upon Rifle Lake, only to be succeeded by day again.

Sunrise saw three men walking briskly northward, passing around the west shore of the lake. They were the Strong-Armed Squad, or, to speak more definitely, Texas Tartar, Yank Yellowbird and Tim Purcell.

There was a resolute, business air about the trio which indicated that they had a stern purpose in view. All were well armed, and the persistency with which they held to their course proved that they had only one object. Tim was as zealous as any one. The work just suited his bold nature, and he was proud to serve under such leaders.

Timothy had one source of delight to which he never tired of referring. From that day his boats could go out on Rifle Lake with safety, for the Horned Fish was a thing of the past. It had been proved a contrivance wholly free from the supernatural; it had been proved not to be a freak of nature; and now there was no harm left in the miserable remnant of the "monster."

The prisoners taken from the craft had been secured in a rude way, but no confession had been drawn from them. Doggedly accepting their lot, they had declined to answer all questions. It was plain, however, that they belonged to the smuggler band, and that the Horned Fish had been put on the lake to aid the gang in getting their contraband goods across the line.

Texas Tartar, Yank and Tim were now off on another expedition, and new developments were hoped for.

The Strong-Armed Squad then numbered four, for Yank's dog gravely kept pace with them. The veteran never became so much devoted to business that he forgot Moses.

"I'll trouble ye ter cast your optics at that dox, Texas," he said, as they tramped steadily along. "Some scoffers might doubt it, but I kin tell you that Moses knows as wal what we're goin' for as we do."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Tim, in surprise.

"To be sure. Moses is a clairviolent mejum, an' he knows a good many things not generally known. My cousin, Nettie Effie Minnie Josie

Yellowbird, the poetess, once tried her han' at bein' clairviolent. The poetry trade was egregious dull that spring, and though she writ up thirteen affectin' strings o' verses on 'Spring,' an' fixed 'em out nice in feet, verses, canter, episodes an' blue ribbons, she couldn't sell 'em. That's why she took ter clairviolence; but, by hurley! she made a failure o' that, too. I'll tell ye about it when I hev time, fur I remember mortal plain how she used ter roll her eyes, snap her jaws like a toad ketchin' flies, make up faces an' kick over the furnitoor. Clairviolence is an atrocious bad complaint ter hev, 'specially ef you're in a temp'rance town, where the old women call ev'ry paroxysm an attack o' jim-jams."

There was stern work ahead, but nothing could check the flow of the mountaineer's whimsical fancy. He talked almost constantly, and his thoughts were chiefly of Moses, his poetess cousin, his Revolutionary grandfather and his remote ancestors.

Nevermiss was in a contented, happy mood. Once more his feet were treading the wild ways of prairie and forest, and nothing could please him more.

North of the lake a river flowed southward through a long, far-reaching wood which, however, was often less than a mile wide. This was the course which the men took, and under Texas Tartar's guidance, they hurried into the British dominions further and further, and hour after hour.

Wilder grew the wood as they progressed, until it was little more than a jungle, but they took no rest. Higher mounted the sun, until it hung almost directly overhead, and cast upon the ground little spots of gold—the only parts of its yellow light that were able to struggle through the thick tree-tops.

At last a river was reached which, flowing in an easterly direction, was of considerable width. There Texas Tartar paused.

"It is time for you to take charge, Nevermiss," he observed.

"Close onder them, be we?"

"Yes."

"All right; we'll look 'em up; but first, le's have some dinner. I feel melancholy in my stummick, by hurley!"

"Bogorra, Oi feel loike a bank afther dho cashier has skipped to Canada!" added Tim.

They had brought food, and their humble meal was at once begun.

"It is now time for me to make a fuller explanation, Tim," remarked the detective, "and I will tell you, briefly, how I found the smuggler village. Yank was quite right when he said that I went in the smuggler boat, that night, in place of the guard whom we captured. The man who was shot was not I. That tragedy arose from a quarrel between two men who had been drinking heavily. They were desperate fellows, and when one applied a hard name to the other, he drew a revolver and fired. The man was killed, and his companions threw the body into the lake.

"By great good luck I escaped discovery. The boat took us to the head of the lake, and as far up the river as we could row. Then we completed our journey on foot, and arrived at the smuggler headquarters before morning. What I have called their village is only a collection of five or six huts, all small but one. Here about a dozen of the men make their home, and that they have never been discovered was owing partly to the tangled wood and the inferior size of the 'village,' and partly to the fact that what little searching had been carried on, before, has been directed to points too far east.

"When I arrived at the village I knew that all of my association with the gang must end that night. It was rare good luck that I had escaped discovery so long, but it would not continue after the dawn of day, so I improved my time and learned what I could. One thing which I did learn was about the Horned Fish. I found out—that I had long suspected—that it was a craft belonging to the smugglers; and I also got that inkling to its hiding-place which enabled me to find it yesterday. I also obtained certain facts which have led us to undertake this trip.

"Before day dawned I deserted the village, but remained in hiding near at hand until nearly noon, observing whatever I could. After that I returned to Powderhorn Mile."

By the time this explanation was finished their dinner was eaten, and progress was resumed with Yank at the front. Secrecy was then the main object. They were near the village, and discovery by a wandering smuggler might ruin all their plans.

Nevermiss was in his element, and he glided through the bushes with inimitable skill and caution. Texas Tartar gave him some points as to direction, and they finally reached a position where the "village" lay revealed to their gaze.

The detective had done well to speak of the dwellings as huts. They were only rude concerns of sticks, pine boughs and bark—just enough to protect their careless, free-and-easy occupants from the elements. A hillside had been chosen for the village, and as it was rough and wild, the huts were in all kinds of erratic situations,

both as to individual position and in relation to each other.

No human being was visible, but from two of the huts smoke was lazily ascending, indicating that some one was inside.

The adventurers waited patiently, and they were not long kept in a state of uncertainty. Four men emerged from one of the huts. They were rough, lawless-looking fellows, but were not then in a hostile mood. Laziness seemed to rule supreme. They exchanged a few words in a languid way, and then sat down on the ground, produced a pack of cards, and began to play.

An hour passed. The game continued, but there was no further excitement.

This was not according to the wishes of the trio outside the camp. They had come with a fixed purpose, and it did not seem likely to be gained without a change in the scene.

Naturally, night would be the safest time for them to work, but the delay was not at all to their taste. Yank and Texas Tartar consulted. The rough, uneven ground was in their favor, and the possibility that they could creep along among the rocks and bushes was enough to make them anxious to try it. There was danger in the attempt—danger so great that no ordinary man would have dared it—but they were not to be stopped by that.

The only question with them was, Did the attempt promise success?

They were not sanguine, but their decision was soon made. They would undertake it, and trust to good luck to carry them through.

"We'll all go tergether," added Yank. "I'll lead the way, an' I consait thar won't be no trouble."

"How about the dog?"

"What about him?"

"What is to be done with him?"

"Wal, I consait not much. He don't need no help, Moses don't. Ef he don't crawl as wal as you nor me, you kin sell out my share in the resk, cheap."

"Enough said. Lead on, mountaineer!"

"Crawl jest as I do."

This was easily said, but those who followed found it impossible to obey. Long years of experience had given Yank skill they could not hope to equal, and to themselves their own movements seemed clumsy in the extreme.

Moses, however, did all that his master had claimed for him, and nothing was to be feared on that point.

They had drawn nearer the center of the camp, but still had some distance to cover, when Nevermiss came to a sudden halt. One of his fingers was bent toward the largest structure, and as the others looked they discovered a new actor on the scene—a tall, imperious-looking man, who had evidently just come out of the long shanty.

Texas Tartar touched Yank's arm.

"It is the smuggler leader!" he whispered. "Be careful while he is in sight, for he has a pair of eyes too keen to trifle with!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FIGHT IN THE VILLAGE.

THE smuggler chief remained quiet for several minutes, but his eyes were busy. He looked first at his card-playing followers, and then swept a keen glance around the camp.

"There'll be severer work for you soon than idle gambling!" he suddenly declared.

"How's that, Cap?" asked one of the card-players, looking up.

"We leave here to-night."

"We do?"

"Yes, I don't like the looks on the horizon, at all. Each one of you see that his traps are ready for removal before dark. We'll carry them to the river and be off by nine o'clock."

"What's the racket, Cap?"

"I scent danger!"

With this brief, curt answer the smuggler leader turned away. He went a few paces toward the southern wood, and seemed inclined to go on a scouting expedition, but, after a few moments of hesitation, turned back and re-entered the shanty.

"He's sp'ishous," observed Yank, in a whisper. "He don't know we're 'round, I consait, but he's uneasy."

"Is it safe for us to go on?"

"We can't be safe anywhar 'round hyar, but I consait we'll wait awhile 'fore movin', though we may ketch some egregious complaint from the damp ground."

"But the ground may have some property which will rid you of neuralgia."

"I never expect ter get red o' the newrolgy," said the mountaineer, shaking his head gloomily.

"I've done about all that science an' theology could suggest for it, but it has got so grafted inter my bones, muskles, sinners an' nerves that you might as wal try ter bleed a flint rock."

"Once I's down in St. Louis an' heard about a doctor who could cure 'bout ev'ry thing, so I went ter him. He caled' his 'stablishment by some egregious long-winded name which, I b'lieve, was Infarnal Dissipation."

"Probably you mean Infirmary, or Dispensary," suggested Texas Tartar.

"That was it—that was just it!" Yank de-

clared, shaking his forefinger at the detective. "I rec'leck the sign now, plain. It read, 'Dr. Pollard's Select Infirmary an' Dispensation.' Your idee was right, Texas; though why he give it sech a mortal jaw-breakin' name I dunno. Wal, in I went, an' I found him at his post like a militia corporal on muster-day."

"Is this the Infirmary?" sez I.

"It is, my good man," sez he, benignant.

"I wan't ter be cured," sez I.

"What's yer inflection?" sez he.

"A malev'lent case o' atrocious newrolgy," sez I, wincin' a leetle as it give me a twinge in the hip.

"Your blood is bad," sez he.

"Not much, it ain't," sez I, quick an' peppery, fur he made me mad. "I'm a Yellowbird," sez I; 'son o' Melchizedek Yellowbird, o' Peterses' Corners; an' half-brother ter Peleg Yellowbird, the learned fish-peddler; an' we are an old an' honorable family, an' trace our jinnewology ter Adam an' Eve; an' my gran'father was a Revolutionary relict an' posted on the tick-tacks o' war, an' our blood is as good as anybody's blood," sez I.

The doctor had been tryin' ter stop me, but I was atrociously riled up, an' I wouldn't hear ter him till I got ready.

"My dear sir," sez he, then, 'you wrong me. I intended no harm; I only spoke in gin'ral terms."

"Better speak in colonel tarms arter this," sez I.

"How long hev you had newrolgy?" sez he.

"'Bout forty year," sez I, 'but it's b'en in the family ever sence Hannibawl the Great took Rome."

"Hered'tary, eh?" sez I.

"Yes, it hurts like p'ison," sez I.

"What hev you done for it?" sez he.

"I offered ter retire it on a pension, but it wouldn't go," sez I.

"Have you taken much medicine?" sez he.

"Enough ter float a ship," sez I.

"When do you suffer most from it?" sez he.

"When it gits ter achin'," sez I.

"No levity!" sez he.

"Not any," sez I.

"Do ye feel it all the time?" sez he.

"Not when I'm asleep," sez I.

"We'll drive it out o' yer system," sez he.

"Better try coaxin' it," sez I.

"In a measure, we will," sez he. "You go home," sez he, 'an' git inter bed between two feather-ticks, an' have yer wife keep hot bricks at yer feet an' feed ye on catnip tea an' red pepper. Keep it up fur three weeks. Drugs ain't no good in your case," sez he, 'but my prescription will do the job."

"It will, will it?" sez I, in an elevated tone o' manner. "By hurley! I consait it *will* when I try it. Sleep 'tween two feather beds, shall I?" sez I. "Laud o' Goshen! I ain't slep' on a feather-bed fur thirty year, an' wouldn't, nohow. As fur my wife, I'm a ondiluted old bachelor, an' take catnip tea I *won't*! Take me fur a baby with the colic?" sez I. "Want ter fill my stim-mick up with extrack o' weeds an' cause apple-perplexity an' liver distempers, do ye?" sez I. "Not much you won't, mister! Present yer bill, an' I'll git out o' hyar quicker'n hurley!" sez I.

The atrocious critter began ter write out his charges, an' he made the figgers a '15,' but just then I got a twinge o' voylent newrolgy an' accidentally slammed my rifle down on the floor; an' he run his pen through the '5' mortal quick, an' only charged one dollar, 'stead o' fifteen.

"I marched out o' his office, an' I ain't doctored none fur the condemned newrolgy sence. It don't pay, fur it ain't ter be wrestled down."

"You are greatly to be pitied," observed Texas Tartar, who was well aware that the mountaineer's neuralgia existed only in his humorous conceit.

"Land o' Goshen! I should say so; but that won't help us do our work. While I've b'en talkin' I've watched, too, an' I reckon we had better crawl along ag'in. Wait an' artom. I don't mean no disrespect when I say you two ain't used ter crawlin' like snakes, an' it may be jest as wal fur you ter hold back a bit. You see that dwarfed pine over thar?"

"Yes."

"Ef you an' Timothy will go thar an' wait, I'll thank ye; an' pooty soon I'll have a report ter make."

"We will obey you fully."

"Good-by, then."

Nevermiss waved his hand and began creeping forward, while Texas Tartar and Tim made their way to the designated point. They could no longer see Yank, but bent their gaze upon such parts of the village as were visible, and awaited the result.

Two or three minutes passed, and then the smuggler leader came out of his quarters again. This time he seemed to have some well-defined purpose in view, for he started off at a brisk pace.

The men by the pine beheld his movements with sudden alarm—his course was directly toward where Yank was supposed to be.

"Bogorra, there will be a skrimmage now!" Tim breathlessly exclaimed.

"Yank may avoid notice."

"He can't do it!"

Even as the boatman spoke, the smuggler suddenly paused. His gaze was bent downward, and it was plain that he had made some discovery—what it was quickly became clear.

Up from the ground sprung Yank, and his long arms were wrapped around the outlaw. The latter was borne resistlessly to the ground, and the mountaineer's prowess was shown by the fact that not a cry escaped his victim's lips. One moment both were upon their feet; the next they had entirely disappeared from view. Yank had struck no blow and done the smuggler no harm, but had put him out of sight with wonderful skill.

Unluckily his work, quick as it was, had not passed unseen. A cry arose from one of the card-players; he addressed some remark to his companions, and then the whole party ran toward the scene of interest.

Texas Tartar leaped to his feet, and a second later Yank's voice arose. It was cool and deliberate, but it sounded a signal well known to the detective.

"To the rescue, Tim!" he cried, and then bounded down the steep hillside at reckless speed.

Fast as he went he did not lead the rescue-party. A deep, ominous growl broke from the dog's throat, and then he flashed past Texas Tartar.

The smugglers were first on the scene, and Yank's clubbed rifle was seen to circle through the air and fell one of the enemy, while, in a moment more, Moses bore a second to the ground. Then Yank's other allies reached the spot and plunged into the fight. If they could have been left alone with their present adversaries they would not have worried concerning the result; but the cries of the smugglers were sounding loudly, and others came running to their aid.

Yank Yellowbird swung his rifle again and sent another victim down, stunned or disabled.

"Wade inter them!" he shouted. "Remember yer pedigree an' don't git licked! Cut yer bigness, an' hew right down ter the line. Clean 'em out as Samson did the Hottentots!"

If anybody replied the words were not to be distinguished. All were busy. The smugglers were standing up well, but they had met good men. Yank was a host in himself, and his blows told every time; Texas Tartar fought sturdily by his side; Tim Purcell swung a convenient club, which he had picked up, and he swung it with reckless vim: while Moses fought like a veritable tiger.

The assailants were outnumbered, but they did not once show signs of weakness. Presenting a bold front they struck wherever an enemy was to be found, and the fruit of their gallant efforts suddenly became apparent.

The smugglers hesitated; then one of their number took to his heels. This was enough to decide the fight. Consternation seized upon all who were left, and with perfect accord they turned and dashed away into the woods.

Yank's exultant shout followed them. "Hurrah fur our side! We've cleaned 'em out, an' now fur the obhject of our trip. Le's sarch the huts right away!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A FATEFUL REVOLVER-SHOT.

THE following morning David Westerley entered Robert Kendall's prison-room. Kendall did not seem to be in the best of spirits, and his greeting lacked cordiality.

"How do you find yourself?" David asked.

"Happy! Why should I be otherwise?"

"You are certainly unfortunate, but have courage: all will come out well."

"Is there new evidence?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"I don't suppose you can testify in my behalf?"

"I certainly shall, but I am afraid I can't help you much."

"Dave," replied the prisoner, abruptly, "circumstances lead me to break my reserve somewhat. Tim Purcell says he saw me return from a trip in one of his boats, the night of the tragedy. I have denied it heretofore; now I admit that he was right."

"Indeed! Is that all?"

"No!" was the reply. "I went out in the boat with an innocent object. I was restless, and was seized with a strong desire to get the lake breeze fully. I intended to pay Purcell for the use of his boat. What I saw made me resolve never to let any one know of my trip. Can you surmise what it was?"

Kendall looked at Westerley with a scowl, but the latter simply looked surprised.

"No," he responded.

"Then I will tell you. I saw you and Edgar meet the smugglers and receive the contraband lace!"

David started back.

"What?" he cried, with an air of unmeasurable surprise.

"Didn't I speak plainly?"

"I don't understand—"

"I saw the smuggler boat land. It was received by two men. I landed and waited. The smugglers were awhile on shore, and then

they went out on the lake again. You and Edgar came near the water and watched them go. Then I heard you ask Edgar if he had the lace safe. He said he had. 'Then let us go home,' you returned, and you both walked west."

Kendall spoke in curt, ungracious tones, but David quickly answered:

"Great heavens! do you think we were in league with the smugglers?"

"What else am I to think?"

"You are mad—mad! Why, man, Edgar and I have been secretly hunting the smugglers for weeks. It was our whim to keep the matter to ourselves. The night you mention we, too, saw the smugglers land, but it was not we who received them. The lace, of which I spoke to Edgar, we found where they accidentally dropped it among the rocks. We, smugglers! Why, Robert, we have of late been treating with one of their allies across the line—I did not intend to confess it until we had learned all—and I now say we hope to prove you innocent through this man. We have had him here at the village—and, by the way, Tabor nearly nabbed us all when he was poking around, as usual. He cornered us and our half-smuggler in the old carpenter's shed one night, but we were not going to give him a share in our game, and we slipped away from him. We, smugglers! Why, Robert, we have been straining every nerve to prove your innocence. Perhaps we have been foolish to work in secret, but work we have to the best of our ability!"

David poured out this explanation rapidly, and Kendall's face was the scene of changing emotions. Surprise, doubt, bewilderment and chagrin succeeded each other, and then his face flushed scarlet.

"David, have I wronged you so foully?" he cried.

"You've wronged us, Rob, but we won't apply any hard names to it. You've been in a hard fix, and it was natural you should doubt even—Heavens! Robert, I see why you would not admit, you were out in the boat! You saw circumstances very much against Edgar and me, and you injured your own cause, by denying that you were out in the boat, for our sake!"

"I had no right to doubt you."

"Don't say it. How were you to know we came by the lace honestly? Robert, your hand!"

Both impulsively moved forward, and their hands crossed in a warm, friendly way.

"We're getting to light!" declared Westerley, with almost boyish enthusiasm.

"I should say so. And you were hunting the smugglers! David, I've been on the same track, though I never progressed much. Do you know, I thought it would be a fine idea to run the gang down all alone, and, resolving to be wholly secret, I purchased a disguise of Amos Nash, the peddler—a blonde wig and false beard. That reminds me to say, perhaps they will be of use to you in your work against the smugglers. They are concealed among the rocks by the five big pines. You know the place?"

"Yes, and I may use them. A blonde wig and beard would be a good disguise."

"Use them if you can."

"I will. And now I'll leave you, Robert, for I have work to do. Be of good cheer, for I'm sure all will end well."

The young men shook hands cordially, and then David left the jail. He went home at once and met Edgar in the hall.

"We have company up-stairs," the younger brother observed, with a look of disgust.

"Who is it?"

"The Ilbrahams, Jacob and Levi."

"What are they doing here?"

"They asked to see Norma, but she was out. Grandford is now with them. What business can those reptiles have with Norma?"

"Have you been in?"

"Not I. I want no acquaintance with them."

"I am going."

David promptly made his way to the room, and found the Ilbrahams talking with Captain Grandford. Old Jacob welcomed him with an expansive smile.

"My dear Meester Vesterley, I am veery glad to see you. I hope you are vell?"

"Thanks. Uncle Lloyd, is there anything new?"

Bestowing the one curt word upon Jacob, David had turned to his relative.

"Nothing new," Grandford replied, gravely.

"My son, Levi, hopes for better things;" and Jacob smiled again, and spread out both hands widely.

"Does he propose to catch the smugglers?" inquired David, with undisguised sarcasm.

"He may, my dear Meester Vesterley."

"He looks like a hero!"

The sneer was so open and bitter that no one could be oblivious to it, and Grandford spoke with mild reproof.

"David!" he uttered, suggestively.

Levi first thrust the favorite end of his melancholy little mustache fiercely up until it pointed at his weak little eye, and then gathered himself on his feet.

"Demme, sir!" he querulously exclaimed, "it

is evident to me that you intend disrespect. I will have you understand that I—I, Levi Ilbraham—am as good as any man here. I am a graduate of Simpson College, an educated gentleman and a scholar. I have, at times, composed Alexandrine poetry. Demme! such a man is not to be insulted with impunity, and I will withdraw!"

The irate young man marched toward the door with dignity as ponderous as he could summon.

"Levi, my son!" cried Jacob, deeply shocked; but out went Levi in great wrath.

"Captain Grandford, see what you haf done," added Jacob, angrily.

"I have said nothing."

"You permitted it. He did der mischief."

Ilbraham looked at David with great hostility, but Grandford first winked to David, and then answered, soothingly:

"Be at ease, Mr. Ilbraham. David meant no harm. He would not willingly injure any one's feelings."

The captain clapped his hand heartily upon David's shoulder, and the latter lost his ill-humor, and smiled.

"I'll take myself off, gentlemen, before I make any further commotion."

So saying, David left the room and went to his own chamber. From there he could watch for Norma's return, and this he intended to do, and keep her from falling into the hands of the Ilbrahams. In David's opinion she would be disgraced by so much as looking at them.

Perhaps ten minutes had passed when he heard some one enter Grandford's room. He paid no particular attention to it, for he knew it might be Susie doing the chamber-work, and his mind turned to other subjects.

A few moments passed; then he was rudely aroused.

A revolver-shot rung out on the air.

David sprung to his feet.

He was not quite sure where the shot had come from, but it filled him with alarm for which he could not account. He hurried into Grandford's room. The window was open; he looked out. Upon the ground lay the captain. As David looked, Grandford partially raised himself on one elbow, and then fell back with helpless force which was terribly suggestive.

The window was not high enough to daunt an active young man, and David sprung out at once. Alighting on his feet he turned to his uncle. A red stream was trickling down upon the ground, and Lloyd Grandford was past human aid.

Even while the young man looked, three persons turned the corner of the house. David looked mechanically and saw Texas Tartar, Yank Yellowbird and a young woman. Even at that tragic moment Westerley started back in surprise as he saw the last of the trio.

It was Eve Hendricks—ALIVE!

Texas Tartar spoke quickly:

"We heard a shot—Great heavens! what is this?"

"My uncle has met with a fatal accident."

"He was trying to escape, probably."

"To escape?"

"Yes."

"Why should he—"

The detective laid one hand kindly, sympathetically upon Westerley's arm.

"Friend David," he replied, "be calm, and may you have strength to bear this blow. I would spare you from it if I could, but it is impossible. Light has come at last, and I am able to say that the evil genius of Powderhorn Mile was Captain Lloyd Grandford!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ERA OF EXPLANATION.

HALF an hour later.

The body of Captain Grandford had been borne to the house, and several persons besides the members of the family were gathered there, in another room.

It had been shown that Levi Ilbraham, after leaving the house in anger, had discovered the approach of the party with Eve Hendricks in charge; and had re-entered the dwelling and given the news to his father and Grandford, whereupon the latter at once left the Ilbrahams. It was clear that he had tried to leap from his chamber-window, and had accidentally shot himself in doing so.

Texas Tartar had announced himself as a detective whose real name was Mark Severn, and at his direction, Sheriff Troy, who had appeared on the scene, put the Ilbrahams under arrest. They had protested, and so had Charles Tabor, who was among those who had gathered—the latter saw his own laurels in danger—but the case was going all one way.

In Grandford's pocket was found a paper, dated the night before, which read as follows:

"I, Lloyd Grandford, see danger ahead. I am going to escape if I can; if not, this confession will be found upon my person when I am dead. I will not be taken alive."

"I am the man who has been the ally of the smugglers at Powderhorn Mile. I entered upon the scheme because I was practically poor, and dependent upon my relatives, the Westerleys. I aided the free-traders all I could, and received a share of

the profits. The only other allies in this village, so far as I know, were Jacob and Levi Ibrahim. They received such of the smuggled goods as could be sold here with safety, and disposed of them over their count-r.

"More than this I was Eve Hendricks's lover. I was much older than she, but that did not stand between us. I really fancied her at one time, but when I knew her better, her lack of education killed my fancy; but when I tried to cast her off, and break our secret association, she would not have it so. She learned of my connection with the smugglers and threatened to expose me. I had her abducted by the aforesaid smugglers, and she is now held prisoner at their quarters. The body found in the lake, and buried as Eve's, was that of a Canadian girl who was killed by a runaway horse which dragged her at the stirrups until her face was mutilated. This mutilation made the cheat successful, as, in other ways, she greatly resembled Eve. I forged the no e purporting to be from Eve, in which suicide was mentioned.

"It was I who gave information to the smugglers by means of which the officers were murdered at the Point of Pines, but, Heaven knows, I never dreamed that my allies would do such a deed. The assault upon Grizzly George was not made by Kendall, but by some of the smugglers who wrongly believed George was spying upon them. I believe Norma was drugged on her wedding eve by Susie, the servant, at the instigation of the Ibrahams. Levi aspired to marry Norma, and hoped to gain something by a postponement of the marriage. I have loathed the two Ibrahams, but dared not anger them. I suspect them of more than I can prove.

"In conclusion, Robert Kendall is an innocent man; not only was he guiltless of the Point of Pines affair, but he was not Eve's 'false lover.' I swear this. I might make many words in deploring the disgrace I shall bring upon my relatives, but I will not. I have sinned—I, and all the rest, must bear the consequences. I solemnly say, however, that there is no guilt upon Kendall or any of the Westerleys. Eve Hendricks will be found at the smuggler camp.

LLOYD GRANDFORD.

Little had the writer of this letter suspected how heavily the revelation would fall upon those who had always believed him good and honorable; but we will pass as lightly over their sorrow as he did.

Texas Tartar sent for the Ibrahams and read the letter aloud.

"It is now in order for you to confess," he said, sternly.

Jacob threw up both hands.

"Bones off my fathers!" he cried, "vat should I confess? Der letter vas false! We are innocent!"

"Fact, by Jove!" nervously agreed Levi, rudely twirling his mustache upward.

"You are both speaking falsely and you know it!"

"Mine kracious! we swear—"

"Explain the lies told by the Jenkins woman."

"She haf told none. Dey vas true, and my son, Levi, vill tell you so. He would never dell a lie."

"Enough! We will send for the woman."

It was done. Mrs. Jenkins came, and in less than five minutes she had been frightened into a confession. The story she told in Ibrahim's store was all false, and she was bired to tell it by Jacob. Levi wished to marry Norma, and Jacob was determined he should. They knew who Eve's real lover had been, and knew that Kendall had bought the blonde wig and beard of Nash, the peddler. Kendall's purpose had been just what he told David, but the Ibrahams saw a chance to turn it to his harm, and, in a few days, proof was to be given that it was he who had made the purchase of the disguise. The idea was to make Norma think Kendall guilty, discard him and marry Levi.

Mrs. Jenkins admitted that Eve had never met any lover at her house; that she had never seen any man in a blonde wig and beard, and that she had simply told the story Jacob concocted for her.

Other explanations followed, partly with the aid of the captured smugglers.

The blanket at the store-house had been carried there by Grandford. He did not know it was marked.

As to the several mysterious letters, that found on the lake-shore by Yank was written by Grandford to Eve, in a disguised hand. How it was lost was not known, but the note found by Albia—the one which caused her so much sorrow—had been lost by Grandford, to whom it was written by the smuggler chief. Only a few words need be said in regard to the third letter—that found in the cabin of the Horned Fish—and that in regard to the reference to Grandford as "a stout supporter of the law." As it was written by the captain to his smuggler ally, it may be taken as a grim pleasantry.

How Norma's handkerchief reached the Point of Pines was explained by one of the smugglers several weeks later. Kendall lost it as he had stated; it was afterward found by the smuggler, and lost by him at the Point of Pines.

Texas Tartar and Yank conducted Eve to her father. The girl had suffered no injury since her disappearance, and as Grizzly George recognized her, even in his demoralized mental state, the reunion was a joyful one.

Yank and the detective walked slowly away.

"Our triumph is complete," observed Texas Tartar. "but it is a sorrowful victory. I pity the Westerleys. Who would have thought Grandford guilty?"

"We can't always tell. Man is a queer insex, anyhow, an' you can't tell when he is white or when black. I feel summat cast down by events myself, an' I shall go on my way as soon as possible. I want ter be trampin', an' I consait Moses does, too. Eh, dog?"

Moses condescended to vibrate his caudal appendage.

"You'll observe he says Yes," Nevermiss added. "By the way, Texas, I take it Kendall an' Norma will git spliced. Hev you picked out a wife, neighbor?"

"Hardly! I am married already."

"That a fact? Wal, give my good will ter Mrs. Texas when you see her. I s'pose you'll keep on as a detective, but I hanker mostly fur the free woods, prairies an' mountains. I'm goin' ter them ter hunt an' take life easy ef I can, but I presume I'll soon git mixed up with another egregious tribulation. Land o' Goshen! tribulations come nat'ral ter me, but whether it's newrology or suthin' else, I try ter uphold the Yellowbird pedigree. Ef you hear o' me bein' in another onpleasantness, you may know some atrocious insex has riled me like the mischief!"

Years have passed, and though Powderhorn Mile still exists, not one of our characters remains there. Where have they gone?

The smuggler band was completely broken up, and its members suffered the full penalty of the law. Texas Tartar's several lots of prisoners went to a stout prison that existed at the village. When the case came to trial a good deal was found against the Ibrahams not connected with this story, and they were sentenced to ten years each in prison. Lloyd Grandford was privately buried near Powderhorn Mile. Susie, the servant, and Mrs. Jenkins, were pardoned, and they disappeared at once.

Tabor went south much chagrined because he had been beaten by Texas Tartar.

Tim Purcell long kept his boats on the lake, and now does similar work in another town.

Grizzly George recovered, and, accompanied by the daughter, went, it is said, to Oregon. No more is known of them.

The Westerleys went from Powderhorn Mile to Kansas. There, a year later, a triple wedding occurred. The contracting parties were Kendall and Norma, David and Albia, Edgar and a young lady he had met in Topeka.

At the exact time of the wedding Texas Tartar was following his profession in St. Louis; while, unobserved by any human eye, Yank Yellowbird and his dog were seated by a campfire in the Rocky Mountains, contentedly making their supper on the choicest part of an animal which the mountaineer had brought down with his long, unerring rifle.

And not one of our characters was more serenely at ease than honest Nevermiss.

THE END.

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